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# **The Wisdom of the East Series**

**EDITED BY**

**L. CRANMER-BYNG**

**DR. S. A. KAPADIA**

## **THE GOLDEN BREATH**

**STUDIES IN FIVE POETS OF THE NEW INDIA**



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WISDOM OF THE EAST

# THE GOLDEN BREATH

STUDIES IN FIVE POETS OF THE NEW INDIA

BY MULK RAJ ANAND

AUTHOR OF "PERSIAN PAINTING," "THE HINDU VIEW OF ART"



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## EDITORIAL NOTE

THE object of the Editors of this series is a very definite one. They desire above all things that, in their humble way, these books shall be the ambassadors of good-will and understanding between East and West—the old world of Thought and the new of Action. They are confident that a deeper knowledge of the great ideals and lofty philosophy of Oriental thought may help to a revival of that true spirit of Charity which neither despises nor fears the nations of another creed and colour.

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## PREFACE

**THE** five essays included in this little book were originally designed as introductions to the premier Indian poets of the day, and have all been delivered as lectures or published in the periodical press in India, England, and America. Although I am very conscious of the many faults of form from which they would thus seem to suffer, I put them forward as a humble tribute to the spirit of modern India in which I believe.

It will be noticed that throughout my treatment of my subjects I have been more concerned to draw out the message each one of them has for us than to discuss the various problems connected with their respective techniques. But not only would elaborate discussions of their individual styles have expanded this volume beyond the space allotted to me in the *Wisdom of the East Series*, they would have minimised the effect of the Indian critical emphasis on the moral and mental implications of poetry.

For the Hindu view of poetry, like the Hindu view of art, has been a projection in the special field of poetry of the fundamental principles of Hinduism as a religion and philosophy. The

same God, *Ananda* (Bliss) and *Ishvara* (Supreme), who was the ideal of realisation of the philosopher and the devotee respectively, became in the hands of the writers of Poetics and Rhetoric, *Rasa*, the ideal of delight to be experienced in the contemplation of poetry.

The reason for this lapse of the Indian artistic intelligence, as the European æsthete might call it, is, as will appear from the introductory essay appended to this volume, inherent in the course which the Indian consciousness has followed in the process of its development. We see first the Indo-Aryans reciting hymns to the powers of nature and to their souls out of a sheer exuberance of feeling in the supreme moments of their good and evil experience. We come then to the poet-philosophers of the *Upanishads* meditating on the elements and uttering themselves to elucidate their crises of mental maturity. The authors of the Epics, the *Ramayana*, and the *Mahabharata*, and the poets of the classical renaissance, set out to preach a moral and to adorn a tale. The mediæval and modern literatures have been mainly religious and esoteric in their significance.

The historians and critics of India, knowing that all the literature of their inheritance had been produced by ardent devotees who loved God and sang to Him because they couldn't help it, laid down that the problem whether a work of art is good or bad should be decided by resorting to the

simple internal criterion : whether the artist in question had succeeded in evoking the mystery of the Divine Spirit which he desired to suggest—a standard applicable by any genuine reader who looks at poetry in the humble spirit of sympathetic consideration, because he seeks through it to evoke the same ideal in himself, and is indeed prepared to perfect in his heart the song left imperfect by the poet. To aid the creative imagination of the poet in the skilful manipulation of his material with a view to securing good workmanship were drawn up a large number of technical rules and formulæ. But an “art for art’s sake” has never been practised in India ; criticism for the sake of criticism was always dismissed as a parasite. And in spite of the fictitious critical science created by the postulation of the term *Rasa* (Delight), for *Ananda* (Bliss), and *Ishvara* (Supreme), poetry, like painting, sculpture, and the other arts, remained the handmaid of religion, the servant of philosophy.

This is, perhaps, as it should be. For when a civilisation has sincerely sought to explore all the ramifications of experience and then resorted to a belief or beliefs in the widest, the broadest, the most universal truths that its philosophers can discover, the venerators of that belief or those beliefs need not be afraid to rest back upon the solid foundations of systematised religious faiths, offering symbols which express the mystery of



human life and "justify the ways of God to man."

The five poets of the New India all seek to "justify the ways of God to man," and as such I have treated them in this volume, interpreting the values of their respective faiths and presenting such considerations of philosophical religious and sociological import as may interest the reader in their prophecies.

I would wish to thank all those who have permitted me to reprint lectures and articles from their publications. And it is an opportunity I would not forego to pay my homage and gratitude to L. Cranmer-Byng, the Editor of this Series, for all those kindly words of encouragement and good counsel with which he showed to a youth, diffident and groping, the prospect of a new "vision of Asia."

M. R. A.

HENDON, 1932.

## INTRODUCTION

**THERE** is a view of the nature of history which reduces the idea of progress to the fact of a geometrical cycle. According to this view, the successive generations of men do not add anything new to the sum total of our essential knowledge, but merely work out the implications of ancient ideals to their logical conclusions, or re-interpret those ideals to bring about a renaissance.

There is a certain appropriateness in the application of this view to the literature of India, for the fundamental character of that literature was fixed once and for all in the dim dawn of history, and ever since one generation of Hindus after another has been mainly concerned to further the ideals then formulated, or to restate them in the light of new experience.

What, then, is the fundamental character of Indian literature ?

The answer to this question, stated generally, is that from its first mature articulation in the *Rig-Veda* to its latest expression in the poetry of the five contemporary authors treated in this volume, Indian literature breathes the golden breath of a great and lofty idealism, a belief in the deepest

self of man as the highest goal of life, and of the whole universe as a manifestation of the world-soul, to be realised in a union of the seen and the unseen.

How did this truth, this ideal, this fundamental character of Indian literature, come to be ? How was it determined and how has it been interpreted from time to time through the ages ?

In order to grasp the nature and development of any literature, we have to look at the kind of consciousness which evolved that literature.

The original founders of Indian literature were one of the two branches of that great Aryan race which suddenly appears on the scene of world history as if out of nowhere, and wandering over the barren wastes of Central Asia, pours down through the passes of the Hindu Kush into the Indus valley to spread into the Gangetic plains.

A primitive race of pastoral nomads, the Aryans had some natural poetry before they entered India. The magnificent splendours of blue and turquoise heavens, the dread wonders of high-pinnacled purple rocks, evoked from their primæval, naïve consciousness, ecstatic songs and exclamations of the sort one hears children make when they are faced with such curious phenomena as the sun, the moon, the earth, and the stars :

Where goes the Sun by night ?

Where is the moon by day ?

What lies behind the sky ?

Why don't the stars fall down ? (*Rig-Veda.*)

Sometimes the very excess of riotous elements in the open wilds exorcised from their imaginations, hardened into a listless apathy by the difficulties of the way, the wild apparitions of love and hate, vague concoctions of beneficent gods and malignant deities. Dyaus is the lightning smiling through the cloudy skies ; Surya is the spirit behind the Sun's dazzling orb of indescribable brightness. Yama is the magical being who brings the darkness of death, Prithvi the soul of Earth. Over all these Varuna, the God of the limitless vault of the heavenly firmament presides, holds sway.

When the Aryans filtered through the exuberant landscapes of the upper Himalayas and settled down in the Indus plains, their sensibility quickened and a religion of polytheism came to prevail. Wanderers have very little religion, and thought only arises when men come to stay. The Aryans were tired of wandering now, sick of it, as the gipsies sicken of wandering when in their struggle to get away from the formulæ and rules of settled existence, in search of the real life, the life of romance, that struggle and search itself becomes a formula of neglect, a rule of living in the dirt and squalor of biting, choking, pungent fumes, of wallowing in the mire of indescribable odours. And now in the face of a gentle geography of the flat, verdant earth, and a soft star-lit sky, their vague unconsciousness crystallised into an

awakening, into a consciousness both of itself and of the universe around it.

The loveliest lyrics in the *Rig-Veda* (one of the four original documents of Indian literature), those in which the exuberant reactions of the Aryan consciousness are disciplined and refined to an imagery and metaphor of the simplest and most exquisite proportions, assuredly belong to the period of the Aryan settlement of India, to the days when the spirit of India, that mysterious something which those who have lived in India know to be a living, feeling, active reality, was upon them.

From the dark night of endless, weary journeyings arose the silver presence of a sweet new *Dawn* :

This light has come, of all lights the fairest,  
The brilliant brightness has been born, far-shining,  
Urged onward for god Savitri's uprising.  
Night now has yielded up her place to Morning.

The Sun that smiles on the lips of the Eastern horizon after this dawn is not different from the deity to which the Aryans had addressed several hymns in Central Asia. But he is the new Sun, softer and gentler, staring down so meaningfully that the face of the poet looking up to it is bathed in the golden blush of a strange new wonder. He must really be the "all-creating," vital Being from whom all things are born. So the poet sings

the *Gayatri* hymn, which has been repeated in the morning by every Hindu for two thousand years since :

May we attain that excellent  
Glory of Savitri the god,  
That he may stimulate our thoughts.

The subtle variations of the Indian seasons disclosed phases of natural phenomena not all pleasant, but pleasanter and comparatively more bearable than those which the Aryans had known in Central Asia. The gods, therefore, whom they had once painted in thick daubs of the most lurid colours, they now defined in mellow tints of the loveliest lyric quality. Indra, the god of thunder and lightning on whose appearance the mountains, the sky, and the earth trembled in terror, is now almost a human being, a handsome, able general leading his armies, seated in his triumphal chariot and fighting his foes, often terribly, yet never with the inhuman brutality with which his original warfare was conducted.

This humanism was most probably the result of the influences which the Aryans acquired during their conquest of India. For the original inhabitants of the country, the Dravidians, a dark, emotional race of rich and fertile minds, had, long before the Aryans came, developed a vast humanistic culture on the basis of a philosophy of *Samsara* (universe) in which man was born and

reborn according to his *karma* (deeds) and in which he sought to realise himself in *yoga* (union) by the practice of *bhakti* (devotional worship) of all the various gods of his instincts and nature powers. The Aryans assimilated the fundamental truths of Dravidian philosophy as they borrowed the deities of the native pantheon and seem from the middle portions of the *Rig-Veda* to have merged their essentially simple genius with the complex impulses of the Dravidian consciousness. The ghostly spectres of their arid imagination have for a time become full-blooded realities. Everything has become localised, everything has concretised.

In the last part of the *Rig-Veda*, however, the Nordic tendency for abstract generalisation again becomes prominent. The result is a cosmogonic poetry of the purest kind imaginable—a poetry in which the personal realisations of elemental experience by the poet render themselves in a universal symbology. The hymn of creation (X.129), the acme of Rig-Vedic thought in its exposition of a central Reality manifested in Soul and matter, is also perhaps the noblest utterance of this first period of Indian literature, the Vedic.

The idealism formulated in this hymn, the product of many centuries of imaginings and intuitions, is, however, thickly veiled in the vague mists of doubts and misgivings. As soon as the Aryan wars of conquest were finished, the un-

employed warriors turned hermits and retired to reflect on the problems of life and death in the austere solitude of North-Indian forest retreats. The *Brahmanas*, *Aryanyakas*, and the *Upanishads* (the next three books of the Hindus) record the poetic-philosophic utterances of the dwellers in the forest ; give expression to those musings of the warriors turned saints, which with their artless art exhaust all the possibilities of a tersely stated verse, as with their seemingly naïve, ungarnished truths they complete all the possibilities of philosophic speculation. The whole universe is said to constitute the stuff of a fundamental Reality, *Brahman* manifesting Itself through the veil of *Maya* (Unreality), so that It may realise Itself in manyness, in multiplicity. Man, who partakes of the essential Reality, is said to have a corresponding urge to realise himself by securing emancipation from the bonds of appearance and stimulating in himself an awareness of his *atman* (mind), his *Brahman* (body), to enjoy *Ananda* (bliss).

The severe intellectualism that had gone to the evolution of this philosophy gave it an air of barrenness against which in the second and third centuries B.C. sprang up two ardent humanistic revolts, Buddhism and Jainism. An extensive literature on every conceivable problem of human life written during this time yielded a sacred prose, shot through with the infinite tenderness of the authors of these religions. But the poetical



history of the Aryan conquest and settlement of India is contained in the two epopees, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

It is impossible for the common reader not to sit back in despair at his own littleness when brought face to face with the stupendous harmony of these two pageants. The vastness alone of their themes, impregnated with religious tradition, ethical wisdom, and philosophical belief, makes them two of the greatest dramas ever conceived in the mind of man. Records of the political aspiration, artistic achievements, and social endeavours of the first millennium of Indian culture, they are also, in a sense, a significant expression of the spirit of India of all times. For their accumulation of the widest and the intensest experience of which mankind is capable spiritually, made them the inexhaustible storehouse of imaginative truth from which each succeeding generation of Hindus has mainly drawn the nascent power with which to renew itself.

The composition of the Epics (which had been sung for centuries in ballad form) lasted well over the first two or three hundred years after the death of Christ. They betray, therefore, the development of two strains of religious and philosophical thought: the Vedantic intellectualist and the later humanist. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (The Song of the Lord), a little treatise appended to the *Mahabharata*, however, these two modes of

speculation consummate a reconciliation. The way to the realisation of Reality through renunciation of world ties and the way to the realisation of God, the Higher Self, through the disinterested, dispassionate performance of good deeds while partaking of ordinary social activity, are, says Krishna (the symbol of the metaphysical Absolute), both equally good and commendable ways of life. But so enormous are the difficulties of the way of renunciation, that the *Gita* gives an emphatic preference to the second, more humanistic approach. This preference with its attendant sanctions of tolerance and practicability was not without its effect on the actual life of the next few centuries to come.

For in or about A.D. 400 arose in North India a dynasty of kings which owed its being to Vikramaditya of Ujjain, a monarch whose culture was so wide as to have made him almost a legend in the annals of Hindustan. India became the scene of a golden age. Politically it became a homogeneous whole, stretching from its centre in the Gangetic valley to the far borders of Persia and Afghanistan in the north and over the wider half of the peninsula in the south. Racially, Hinduism knit it together into a unity on the basis of the ritualistic worship of an ideal God of the deeper self, which tradition had bequeathed to it. In the realms of literature and art it brought about a comprehensive renaissance.

Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Harsha, are some of the greatest poets India has known. Their special field was the poetic drama, and anyone who reads the splendid tribute which a great European practitioner of that form, Goethe, paid to a creation of one of these Indian poets, Kalidasa, will arrive at some idea of the success which the Hindus achieved in the domain of theatrical activity :

Wilt thou the bloom of the Spring and the fruits that are later  
in season,  
Wilt thou have charms and delights, wilt thou have strength  
and support,  
Wilt thou with one short word encompass the earth and  
heavens ?  
All is said if I name only, Sakuntala, thee.

There is in the Classical Sanskrit literature, and especially in the works of Kalidasa, a deep and intimate communion with the spirit of India's magnificent flora and a rich intuition into the palpitating, quivering, emotional psychology of the Indian race unparalleled anywhere in the whole history of Indian literature. And yet the artists and the writers of this renaissance have so controlled their material, so disciplined the spontaneous exuberance of their personal vision, that, essentially lyrical though their work is, it wears the air of a pure impersonal art. We have seen how this trait is patent in the face of the hymns of the *Rig-Veda*, and we will see later how it re-emerges in the mediæval and modern literatures of

India. Meanwhile it may be said that nowhere has the Hindu literary genius rendered the individual strains of an essentially lyrical, limited, and imperfect human experience in terms of such universality, such genuine living formality, as in the Classical age. Look, for instance, at a passage from Kalidasa's *Megh-Duta* (The Cloud Messenger) chosen almost at random : A cloud is entrusted a message by a lover resident in the north of India to his beloved in the south. The poet makes his hero acquaint the bearer of his missive with the perils and the joys of the way.

“The mountain peak is mantled all about with mango-coverts with ripe fruits a-glisten. Coloured as a comely tress thou shalt soar on high. Now the peak shall worthy wax the seeing of the mates immortal, with nipple black as breast of Earth. . . .”

India has here touched the halcyon moment of her lyricism.

The vigour of the Classical renaissance continued to produce literature and art of the highest kind for four centuries, i.e. from the fourth A.D. to the eighth and ninth A.D. An extensive amount of the lyric poetry and prose romance of this period are well known to Europe, the former from such an example as Sir E. Arnold's translation of Jaya Deva's *Gita Govinda* and the latter through numerous translations of folklore. About the end of the ninth century the fundamental in-

stinots underlying the Classical renaissance were, however, petering out. The growing bulk of the nation's cultural inheritance had evoked a demand for the schedules of literary history, and all the arts and sciences were codified. The writers on Poetics and Rhetoric had classified the conventional metaphor and images occurring in Classical poetry and defined endless rules and regulations about the forms employed in literature. The creative artists, well grounded and grooved in the phrases of dictionaries and catalogues and well versed in the rules of grammar, clothed the florid exuberance of insincere, unfelt conceits in the garb of a pernicious, shell-bound, heavy formalism and lost themselves in a forest of elaborate embroidery.

For a time it seemed as if this general decline into stereotyped formulæ with its attendant evil of pompous bombast would suffocate the literary genius of India to final exhaustion. Suddenly, however, when the outlook seemed darkest, a great wave of religious excitement passed over India in response to the aggressive challenge of Muslim power that threatened the country. A religious revival with its appeal to national sentiment necessarily called forth a religious literature. The *Puranas* (the old books, or rather the exegesis of old books), myths, legends, and stories culled from the Epic and pre-Epic literatures which had been in the process of being written to propagate

the truths of the three chief cults of Hinduism, viz. Vaishnavism, Saivism, Saktism, which had grown up around the worship of individual gods, regarded each as incarnations of the Supreme in Max Müller's sense of henotheism, had preserved the *daimon* of Indian idealism intact behind the purely secular flavours of Classical literature. The Hindus, coming together to integrate the communal creeds of their respective adherences with the spirit of a common law, found in the language of the *Puranas* an inspiration for the building up of their diverse dialects into self-sufficient vernacular literatures.

The general nature of this writing is traditional in so far as it is lyrical and allegorical, using the symbolism of the Divine Spirit as always sporting with his worshippers. But it is a new expression corresponding to the new world that has grown up. The Hindu mind has emerged clean and clear and tender after centuries of vigorous living. The strenuous period of constructive thought is over. The central conception of philosophical idealism has passed like a dogma into the currency of everyday life, and the poet has only to clear the debris of superstitious beliefs to create the essence, the sum of his experience in new modes of speech. And since he knows his new, pure God will not appreciate the hackneyed effusions of old and conventional sentiment, he is restrained, resorts to understatements, and produces a simple, mellow

movement which will still his sighs of despair, which will stimulate his gentle loving smile of devotion into a deep real sense of intensity :

The vessel of a thousand sins and plunged  
Deep in the heart of life's outrageous sea,  
I seek in thee the refuge of despair.  
In mercy only, Hari make me thine.

This verse by Ramamuja is characteristic of the literature in the main, although the philosophical emphasis of each of the three principal sects that came to be, involves the use of a distinct symbolism in each case.

The Vaishnava poets and reformers, for instance, Shankracharya, Madhava, Nam Dev, Tuka Ram, Ramananda, Kabir, Vallabha, Tulsi Das, Chaitanaya, express their longings either through the story of Rama and Sita or through the concept of the Supreme Spirit concretised in Krishna and his maids. The delicate tremors of their soft rhythms and their tender, minor refrains, have left an abiding influence on Hindi and other North Indian literatures, and, as we shall see later, on the Bengali of Rabindra Nath Tagore.

The Saivite hymnists, the fathers of all contemporary South Indian literatures, are dominated by the terror and tenderness of the dancing Siva, Nataraja, and have fused their moods into graces of which we might get an idea from such a line as this :

Thou mad'st me thine ; did'st fiery poison eat,  
That I might their ambrosia taste pitying poor souls.

A very much similar note rings through the lyrics of the *Saktas* dedicated to the consort of Siva, Kali, mother of the world, destroyer, preserver, and creator. The intense obsession with the unconscious forces of the human psyche, the centre of which in the mysterious Kundalini is supposed by the *Saktas* to evoke the consciousness of Reality, would seem, from their weighty expositions in the *Tantras*, to lend the poets of this sect a morbid interest in the dark, prenatal mysticism of the blood. Instead, one finds them interpreting the violent circumstances of the mother and son relationship with a subtlety of human understanding that lifts the so-called obscenity of psycho-analytical unravellings to poetic realisations of infinite depth and sincerity. Witness, for example, the beautiful pain that permeates the following lines of the greatest of Sakta singers, Ram Prashad :

“ I live in a damaged house, my mother, so in my fear it is to thee that I cry. The tempests have blown it down, but Kali’s name sustained it. Terrified am I of these six thieves that at night come leaping over the mud wall.”

The fine flower of mediæval devotional poetry bloomed in spite of the stormy clouds of conquering Muslim hordes that continually descended on India for some centuries. The very fervour of the Hindu defence against forcible conversion to Islam kept the torch of Indian religion, art, and literature



burning. In the reign of Akbar, the Great Moghul, India had attained a kind of political and social unity very like that of the Gupta golden age. And all the different strands of human activity were fired with a great enthusiasm. The vernaculars had imbibed the deeper influences of Central Asian culture that the Moghuls had brought from the court of Tamerlane, and it looked as if they would grow and prosper in the faith of that renewal of Hindu idealism which Akbar had himself patronised. But Akbar's grandson Aurangzeb was an intolerant, fanatical bigot, who pierced his lance into the heart of that very *daimon* which his great grandfather had embraced with open arms, who struck his iconoclastic sword at the heads of those very gods to whom the people offered their garlands of songs.

A purely secular language had arisen in the camps of the Great Moghuls from the babble of many tongues, Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic, and Persian, styled after the army, Urdu. With a dose of this new ferment in its head and secretly, slowly developing its diverse vernaculars, the Indian muse lingered on a sick-bed, waiting for something to happen, for something that would bring India the solidarity of a political régime untrammelled by the lusts of Imperial aggrandisement. But the chaos continued unabated for two centuries. (In the uncertainty of continual warfare only an abstracted sort of art could prevail, if it

could prevail at all, and in the veritable orgy of destruction that raged all round it seemed as if the entire basis of Indian culture would collapse into the bottomless pit of an everlasting oblivion.<sup>1</sup> Then suddenly, by one of those rare miracles of history which almost lead one to believe in the pre-established destiny of things, there was enacted in India a curious drama of political statesmanship the prologue of which had been written in the court of Elizabeth in the England of three hundred years before.

The British East India Company, which had obtained a charter to trade with the Indies through Elizabeth's envoys to the Moghuls, had now built up a commercial, military, and diplomatic influence before which the contending forces of the other powers, European and Indian, broke down, so that in the late half of the nineteenth century the whole of India came under British sway.

The interaction of the European and Hindu cultures had begun to be felt on the coasts of India much earlier than the ultimate conquest of the country by Britain. Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of India under the East India Company, had evinced a deep interest in Indian religion, and was, indeed, the unconscious agent through whom the influence of the *Bhagavad-Gita* penetrated into the poetry of William Blake. In 1789 Sir William Jones began to translate *Sakuntala*. The emulation of their culture by

Englishmen made the Hindus correspondingly desirous to know something of English culture, and soon they were startled by the "new learning" that the missionaries brought in from the West. Had this relationship been maintained, we do not know what marvels of literature the play of Eastern and Western influences might have produced. But in 1855 Lord Macaulay delivered his notorious minute on Indian education, declared in tones of pompous Imperial and racial superiority that the heathen culture of India had no potential significance and that what Greece and Rome had been to England, England might become to India, thus imposing English as the medium through which all the arts and the sciences were to be studied in the native universities. The result was that the national consciousness of Indian students, which might have been enriched by grasping the fundamentals of European culture, if these had been put before it in the vernaculars, had first to struggle to grasp the medium through which that culture was to be imparted. Even this obstacle might have been surmounted, but the curriculum of the British Universities in India was specifically designed to supply the needs of Government offices, and given Sheridan and Burke in selections (not in the original) and stories from Shakespeare (not Shakespeare in the original), thousands of matriculated Babus were dumped out wholesale from every educational institution in the land

with a very inadequate appreciation of the instincts of European culture and with not an iota of knowledge of their own.

As a reaction to this state of affairs have arisen a few individuals, who, repudiating the British-Indian Universities and seeking to appreciate the culture of Europe alongside their own in the free spirit of give and take, have brought us to the threshold of the new renaissance that is taking place in India to-day. Toru Dutt, a young woman who travelled and studied in Europe, and after having written a book of translations from French romantic poets into English, a French prose romance, and some renderings from ancient ballads and legends of Hindustan, died at the tender age of twenty-one, was the first poet in India to realise her Indian consciousness, as she was the first to perceive the possibilities of applying European technique for the expression of her native genius. In Rabindra Nath Tagore we have perhaps the greatest lyricist of modern times and a perfect product of Eastern and Western influences. Muhammad Iqbal has accomplished a similar fusion in his Urdu and Persian poetry and Puran Singh in his Punjabi verse. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and her brother, though writing more extensively in English than in Hindi and Hindustani, represent the mingling of all those streams of thought that have gone to make South Indian poetry what it is to-day. With these poets India has found a way

by which to express the kernel of her ancient truth unencumbered by the bane of a false imitativeness, undaunted by the bogey of "foreign" truth. In them India has adopted just as much of Western method as will serve her to reconstruct the essential spirit of her inheritance, to conserve the integrity of its vital ancient ideal, for the India of to-day, the India of Tamil, Telegu, Canarese, Malayalam, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Gujerati, and all the other languages which give it the air of heterogeneity, is like the India of the sixty previous centuries, essentially Indian, a symbol of the great ideal truth that the highest self of man and the deepest spirit of nature are in the end one, and that the greatest joy in life consists in the realisation of the soul (*Atman*) in union with Reality (*Brahman*).

## RABINDRA NATH TAGORE

RABINDRA NATH TAGORE was born on May 6th 1861. He began to write poetry at the age of fifteen, and is still active. During the entire span of his literary career he has enjoyed the greatest reputation of any Indian writer, living or dead, and the amount of criticism which his work has called forth in the various languages of the world, especially since he brought the wonderful phenomena of spiritual power of the *Gitanjali* to the disillusioned gaze of the West, is unweighable. A great deal of this enormous literature is, however, uncritical appreciation of the kind which Miss Ethel Manin has maliciously but aptly described as of the Knightsbridge drawing-room kind: "Oh, how too simply Oriental, my dear ! Just too simply Eastern."

Mr. Edward Thompson has more recently rescued the poet from the hot-house salons in which he had lain "bound in yapp" side by side with the box of chocolates, and no subsequent writer on Tagore can fail to be indebted to him for his two masterly studies.

There still remain, however, aspects of Tagore's work which Mr. Thompson was precluded from

treating, presumably because the thesis he had chosen did not admit of them. Against one such aspect, the philosophy, the message of Rabindra Nath, to the exposition of which Sir S. Radhakrishnan once devoted a large wordy volume, Mr. Thompson has very grave objections, objections which I think may become less intense now that Rabindra Nath has published the substance of his Hibbert lectures in the *Religion of Man*. For there the poet has given us a final testament, which if not exactly the testament of a philosopher in Professor Radhakrishnan's sense of that word, is at least the testament of a poet's philosophy.

I propose in the following essay to study Rabindra Nath's poetry in the light of his latest testament in the Hibbert lectures, and to relate the poet more specifically to his antecedents in Indian literary history. For it seems to me that Rabindra Nath, more than any other poet of modern India, has dedicated himself to the rediscovery of ancient Hindu lore :

" When I look back," he writes, " it seems to me that unconsciously I followed the path of my Vedic ancestors ; to me the verses of the *Upanishads* and the teaching of the Buddha have been things of the spirit and, therefore, endowed with boundless, vital growth, and I have used them both in my own life and in my preaching as instinct with individual meaning for me as for others, and awaiting their confirmation, my own

special testimony must have its value because of its individuality."

If we take into account this unequivocal confession of his debt to traditional Hindu thought with his implied, though never expressly stated, obligations to Epic literature, and his oft-recorded gratitude to Kalidasa, and the Vaishnava religious lyricists, we shall find that the most important influences on Rabindra Nath's work have been enumerated, except, of course, that there remains to be noted the fact that he was born in what was once the metropolis of British India, where his ancestors had come "floating upon the earliest tide of the fluctuating fortunes of the East India Company." That it was this last influence which, by action and reaction, kindled the slumbering consciousness of his race in Rabindra Nath will come out later. Meanwhile, it is obvious that on his own evidence he has been travelling on a voyage of rediscovery along the Aryan Path.

The facts of Rabindra Nath's life are too well-known to need a detailed resuscitation here. I shall recount the salient incidents of his crowded career as I go along. But it must be mentioned in anticipation that Tagore's life and poetry seem to me to fall into five main phases, each phase following the dates of five successive visions he has had.



The first of these visions came to him in early childhood. His mother had died while he was almost an infant, and he had learned to love solitude. When he was not occupied in the varied interests of his family he was day-dreaming. So lost was he in his wonderment about the mystery of life that he neglected his studies at school. "They dismembered me from the context of my world," he says, "and I felt miserable, like a caged bird in a biological institute." But "blessed with that sense of wonder which gives a child his right of entry into the treasure-house of mystery in the depth of existence," he stumbled upon himself.

"I still remember," he writes, "the day in my childhood when I was made to struggle across my lessons in a first primer strewn with isolated words smothered under the burden of spelling. The morning hour appeared to me like a once-illuminated page, grown dusty and faded, discoloured into irrelevant marks, smudges, and gaps, wearisome in its moth-eaten meaninglessness. Suddenly I came to a rhymed sentence of combined words, which may be translated thus—'It rains the leaves tremble.' At once I came to a world wherein I recovered my full meaning. My mind touched the creative realm of expression, and at that moment I was no longer a mere student with his mind muffled by spelling lessons, enclosed by

the classroom. The rhythmic picture of the tremulous leaves beaten by the rain opened before my mind the world which does not merely carry information, but a harmony with their being. The unmeaning fragments lost their individual isolation and my mind revelled in the unity of a vision."

It was with this first glimpse into the secret of life that the poet in Rabindra Nath was born. For from his early refusal to learn the alphabet in the prosaic, colourless way it is taught in Indian schools, from this original preference of the image, the metaphor, over the word, to the writing of poetry was a natural process, especially because the artificial impulses that stimulate the actual task of composition were not lacking in Rabindra Nath's life. The scion of a cultured family of rich landholders, he was placed in the very thick of those vital movements, social, political, and intellectual, that were stirring the life of Bengal in the latter half of the nineteenth century. His grandfather had been a leader of the Brahmo-Samaj, and his father, although drawing back from this movement to orthodox Hinduism on account of the growing Christian influence on it, was still the chief figure in the newly formed society, which was religious only in name, and, in fact, the centre of literary men, whose interest in theology was inspired by the new learning then being taught in English missionary colleges.

His brother Jyotindra edited a magazine, *Bharati*, and at his encouragement Rabindra Nath began to write verse and criticism.

Technically he does not attach much significance to any of his early poetry till he came under the influence of "a collection of old lyrical poems composed by the poets of the Vaishnava sect." When these fell into his hands accidentally, he says :

"I became aware of some underlying idea deep in the meaning of these love poems. . . . They sang of a love that ever flows through numerous obstacles between men and Man the Divine, the eternal relation which has no relationship of mutual dependence for a fulfilment that needs the perfect union of individuals and the universal."

But the poet does not think even the work produced under the spell of this second inspiration to be very satisfactory. "Any attempt to test *Bhanu Singh's* poetry" (as these songs were called), he says, "by its ring would have shown up the base metal. It had none of the ravishing melody of our ancient pipes, but only the tinkle of a modern barrel-organ."

Mr. Edward Thompson thinks this judgment too severe ; though having been formulated thirty years after the publication of the verses, when Rabindra Nath had achieved some of the greatest lyrics in Indian literature, the faults of his early poetry would naturally seem to him more acute.

But consider this picture of a scene from *A Poet's Story*, his first poem published in book form :

When with clash and shout the storm  
Rocked the mountain's steadfast form,  
When dense clouds before the blow  
Scudded, frantic, to and fro,  
Lone in mountain peaks I've been,  
And the mighty river seen,  
A thousand thunderbolts have sped  
With hideous laughter o'er my head ;  
Beneath my feet huge boulders leapt,  
And roaring down the valleys swept ;  
Enormous snowfields left their place,  
Tumbled and hurled to the peak's brow.

There is a certain nobility in the poet's sentiments here considering it was written at the age of sixteen. But, of course, he is not yet ripe enough to rival either the Vaishnava hymnists or Kalidasa, his immediate inspirers.

A visit to England in 1877 gave him an opportunity to attend a course of lectures in English literature under Henry Morley at University College, London, and these schooled his gift to some extent. But he was young and ardent, and the cup of his life was filled to overflowing by the exuberance and superabundance of the young poet in him. Drugged with the wine of his own emotion, he poured the liquid into the cup of his audience with such gusto that it overflowed and spilled itself on the sides, making a sticky mess of things for those of his guests who were sober, and

to whom his high-pitched, loud-mouthed songs were sure to seem sentimental. (One of his editors has aptly described Tagore's work of this period (the *Genius of Valmiki*, *The Broken Heart*, *Evening Songs*, etc.) as heart-wilderness ; the poet himself has described it more aptly :

There is a vast forest named the heart  
Limitless on all sides—  
Here I lost my way. }

## II

"When I was eighteen," the poet writes in his Hibbert lectures, "a sudden spring breeze of religious experience . . . came to my life and passed away, leaving in my memory a direct message of spiritual reality. One day while I stood watching at early dawn the sun rising out of its rays from behind the trees, I suddenly felt as if some ancient mist had in a moment lifted from my sight and the morning light on the face of the world revealed an inner radiance of joy. The invisible screen of commonplace was removed from all things and all men, and their ultimate significance was intensified in my mind. . . . That which was memorable in this experience was its human message, the sudden expansion of my consciousness in the supra-personal world of man. The poem I wrote on the first day of my surprise

was named 'The Awakening of the Waterfall.' The waterfall, whose spirit lay dormant in its icebound isolation, was touched by the sun and, bursting in a cataract of freedom, it found its finality in an unending sacrifice, in a continual union with the sea " :

The mountain trembles, the stones  
In vast screes clattering pour ;  
The waters, swelling and foaming,  
In anger and tumult roar ;  
In their mighty exaltation  
They would rend the mountain asunder ;  
Mad with the morning's rays,  
Through earth they would crash and thunder.

And I—I will pour of compassion a river ;  
The prisons of stones I will break, will deliver,  
I will flood the earth, and with rapture mad,  
    Pour music glad.  
With dishevelled tresses, and gathering flowers,  
With rainbow wings wide spread, through the hours  
I shall run and scatter my laughter bright  
    In the dear sunlight.  
I shall run from peak to peak and from hill  
To hill my leaping waters spill ;  
Loudly shall laugh and with claps keep time  
    To my own steps' chime.

The songs that flowed out of Rabindra Nath after his vision were, he says, " the first throwing of his inner self outwards." In them he has " celebrated the sudden opening of a gate." They embody for him " the joy of attaining the Infinite within the finite."

How precisely, it may be asked, has he actual-

ised this ideal of attaining the Infinite within the finite ?

The answer to this question raises, as a preliminary, a difficulty of the utmost importance in the discussion of Tagore : Is he to be judged as a poet or a philosopher ? Western criticism, with its peculiar emphasis on the theory of art for art's sake, would, of course, at once jump up with the answer that Tagore has no significance except as a poet. In the light of Indian ideals of criticism, as I have noted in the preface to this book, the distinction / between poets and philosophers seems rather arbitrary. The beauty of any work of art, a poem, a play, arises from the necessity which has been felt to express its subject-matter, and the subject-matter of all forms of human thought and activity, poetry, painting, philosophy, is reality. The passionate belief in his theme of the poet or the philosopher is perhaps more obvious in his work than that of the painter or the architect, but in the end the institution of differences between the arts is only a convenient mode of classification. Rabindra Nath, asking himself recently whether he is a poet or a philosopher, found : " I am no better than a poet or perhaps a philosopher." We cannot choose, therefore, between Rabindra Nath the poet and Rabindra Nath the philosopher. Let us consider him as a poet-philosopher.

Now, what precisely is the contribution to Indian literature of this poet-philosopher ? With

a subtle perception of his place in the perspective of history Rabindra Nath has styled himself "the gardener" of his country's literature. We have noticed the character of his first merely juvenile poetry, and we have seen how a sudden gush of inspiration made him turn a new leaf in the history of his writing. Let us see how he expresses his deepened intuitions of the new ineffable experience he has had of reality.

Rabindra Nath's first great poem, *Creation, Conservation and Destruction*, is a parable rendering the doctrine of the Rig-Vedic hymn of creation. Brahma, the Absolute, the All-Inclusive, the All-Comprehending spirit of the Cosmos, is seated buried deep in contemplation. He wakes, and desiring joy utters the great hymn of creation through his four mouths—with a rhythmic power that sustains in the formation of its accents the construction of endless worlds through the chaos of endless ages. Vishnu the preserver then steps in and blows his conch to proclaim the coming into being of life and order. Seated on the lake Manas-Sarowar, garlanded with the sun and the stars, he is meditating when Lakshami, the world's desire, arises from the golden lotus, shining and lovely and tempting. The earth, the sun, the moon, the stars are now tired of their daily round. The cry rises for Brahma to awake and destroy the old world and to build it anew. The Great God opens his eyes. Siva comes out at his



bidding and destroys the world. Brahma closes his eyes and resumes his meditation.

This bald summary can in no way suggest the peculiar penetration with which Rabindra Nath has looked across the edge of existence and reconstructed the drama of creation. Out of the void, filled, as it were, with darkness, the light arises like the silent rippling of a wave in the dense sea of consciousness. Slowly and slowly it penetrates the vast empty space, till it becomes a tempest of the varying shades of life, rushing out, a mighty stream, restless, writhing, curling, rolling over and over, dancing and surging, perpetually changing over into infinite unanticipated transformations, torn and lacerated with the pain, the anguish, the desire of its constant, haphazard striving. Then it enters the sea of existence—life. There is a lull; then a storm, a mighty, monstrous, clamorous, thunderous rage of destruction. The light is extinguished, darkness fills the universe. All is over, ending as it began.

That is the kind of feeling Rabindra Nath's rendering inspires in one. It seems that the hidden springs of the poet's genius sought in this early symbolism the meaning of that urge, that call, which stirred its own still waters and started it on its voyage across the world of thought, and it is, I venture to suggest, perhaps the greatest piece of imaginative writing about the beginning

of things that is anywhere to be found in world literature.

We have previously seen how the doctrine of the hymn of creation about the soul and matter constituting the stuff of reality was interpreted by some Upanishadic thinkers with an over-insistence on the soul to the detriment of matter. Rabindra Nath, like most significant poets in India looking into ancient Indian literature, has found that soul and matter are both good, both real, and that the highest life consists in the welding together of the two, in the enjoyment of their fruit here and now. "It is strange," he once told Mr. Thompson, "that even when so young (as at the age of sixteen), I had that idea, which was to grow with my life all along, of realising the Infinite in the finite, and not, as some of our Indian metaphysicians do, eliminating the finite."

The exact working out of this realisation will appear later. Meanwhile, it may be interesting to note "how the great is to be found in the small, the infinite within the bounds of form, the eternal freedom of the soul in love."

In *Nature's Revenge* (a drama Englished as *Sannyasi in Sacrifice and Other Plays*), he relates how a hermit renounces life in search of truth, and is "brought back into the bondage of human affections" by a girl.

"Break the darkness with the thunder's flash !  
If the heart also breaks, let it break ! The house



There is neither rhythm, nor metre. It is meaningless,  
 Joyless  
 Dance of brute Nature  
 Incarnate in a thousand shapes, is mighty Death  
 Dancing there ?  
 Water, vapour, thunder, and wind have found blind forms of  
 being,  
 Are vaguely putting the nerves of their new life.  
 Nothing they know of direction, of hindrance or let !  
 Afraid of themselves, they rush to ruin.  
 See, in the midst, eight hundred men and women  
 Are staring in front of them,  
 Embracing, standing heart to heart !  
 This brute Madness knows not other's anguish !  
 Knows not itself !  
 Why in its midst was the mind of man placed,  
 So loving, so weighed with suffering ?  
 Why is the mother here ? And the infant who looks in her  
 face ?  
 Why does brother clasp brother, and fall on his breast  
 In the sweet rays of the sun, in how much affection  
 They played together, sharing what joy, what sorrow,  
 O piteous hope !  
 Terrified love shaken like the flame of a lamp !

A sensibility which weeps for us, which suffers for us, which goes through our struggles for us, so that our pain may be the less, is rare in any age. That one such should be living among us to-day in India is a wonder ; for India, as I have said above, had for a century wallowed in the mire of decadence before this renaissance began and did not deserve the gifts of the gods.

Rabindra Nath has never had the presumption to place himself on a pedestal above his countrymen, even though the gifts that he has brought to

their service entitled him to assume all the airs of a prophet. But he has never shirked the responsibility which the recognition of the gods within him placed on him : he had suffered for his brethren, therefore he assumed the privilege to which this suffering entitled him—he preached.

And never was a country more in need of preachers (real honest preachers I mean, for of the fanatics it had enough) than India. Its social evils are well known to the world by now ; its intellectual evils had been ignored till Rabindra Nath exposed them. The poet's criticism of India was not, however, of the malicious kind, of which we have been given so much in Europe lately ; it was the sincere, honest criticism of real abuses, by a soul which hated because it loved.

He has told us in his reminiscences how, in the wake of the Indian literary revival, there had sprung up a school of thought which, having learnt from the pages of Max Müller that all civilisation had an Aryan origin, declared that all modern science had been anticipated in the researches of Hindu poet-philosophers. The generalisation may have passed in the round, because Indian literature does disclose positions which extraordinarily uncannily foreshadow philosophic considerations about the nature and origin of matter and mind such as we have arrived at independently, recently, but the absurd length to which the heresy of Aryan perfection was carried in irre-

sponsible attempts to justify all the superstitions of Hindu manners and customs by attaching to them pseudo-scientific explanations, evoked from the broad, the catholic Rabindra Nath, a very just resentment and hostility. He wrote some satirical poems and plays which must long remain monuments of the dauntless courage and splendid justice which has characterised his literary career. Here is his picture of the heirs to "the greatest civilisation that the world has seen":

"In what respect are we inferior to the English? It is a great error to say that we are inferior to them. We differ merely in manners, customs, and outward appearance. We can learn whatever they write and we can write it again in Bengali. . . . Max Müller has said that we are 'Aryans.' Hearing that word, we have given up all solid work and have decided that we are great people, as we lie back in ease."

The passionate sarcasm and the bitter fury of his condemnation of idolatry achieve a tragic height which must be well known to all who have read or seen his play *Sacrifice* and remember the intense cry:

"Look how she stands there, the silly stone—deaf, dumb, blind—the whole sorrowful world weeping at her door, the noblest hearts wrecking themselves at her stony feet!"

## III

“ The next day which had its special significance for me,” writes Rabindra Nath in his Hibbert lectures about the beginning of the third phase of his life-work, “came with all its drifting trivialities of the common-place life. The ordinary world of my morning had come to its close, and before going to take my bath I stood for a moment at my window looking over a market-place on the bank of a dry river-bed, welcoming the first flood of rain along its channel. Suddenly I became conscious of a stirring of the soul within me. My world of experience in a moment seemed to be lighted, and facts that were detached and dim found a great unity of meaning. The feeling which I had was like that which a man, groping through a fog without knowing his destination, might feel when he suddenly discovers that he stands before his own house. . . . To this being I was responsible ; for the creation in me is his as well as mine. It may be that it was the same Creative Mind that is shaping the universe to its eternal idea, but in me as a person it had one of its special centres of a personal relationship growing into a deepening consciousness. I had my sorrows that left their memory in a dark burning track across my days, but I felt at that moment that in them I lent myself to a travail of Creation that ever exceeded my own personal bounds like stars which in their indi-

vidual fire-bursts are lighting the history of the Universe. (It gave me a great joy to feel in my life detachment at the idea of a mystery of a meeting of the two in Creative Comradeship. I felt that I had found my religion at last, the religion of Man, in which the finite became defined in humanity and came close to me so as to need my love and co-operation."

"This idea of mine," continues Tagore, "found expression in some of my poems addressed to what I called *Jivan-devata*."

What, it may be asked, does the poet mean by the *Jivan-devata* ?

Mr. Thompson quotes Rabindra Nath's friend and editor, Prasanta Mahalanobis : "*Jivan-devata* is the presiding deity of the poet's life, the Inner Self of the poet, who is more than an earthly incarnation."

From this authoritative definition it seems to me that we have here a realisation not very different in nature and scope (from the Upanishadic conception of *Atman*.) For just as that is the unchanging constant self of man related in its depths to the Ultimate Reality, so the Lord of the poet's soul is the reflection, the projection of the Supreme Ideal at the centre of existence. Both interpret themselves through the ordinary human consciousness, subject to incarnations, except when one human consciousness probes the deepest, intensest depths of his being and recognises the genius, the urge



which moves him, and uses this genius, this urge for attaining the highest ends of life and (since it does not easily lend itself to use, being lost and involved among the countless minor gods of our unconscious feeling and impulse) cultivates it, worships it.

Rabindra Nath has touched a higher limit of speculation in this realisation of the deeper instincts within him than at any time before. For here in the discovery of that will, which is ever fashioning, even moulding the Universe from its infinite and varied centres in time and space, he has moved his creative energy to formulate a very convincing conception of the Universe as separate and distinct from him, and yet connected with him. By defining the genius within him as a faculty of growth, the poet has secured for himself the underlying theory of the extension of consciousness. The heights to which this experience lifted him will be obvious in all his subsequent poetry. Meanwhile, consider the poem in which he has rendered the vision of one single moment which dominated him, consider the honour that the artist, recognising himself in the mirror of time, does himself :

Thou who art the innermost spirit of my being art thou  
pleased,

Lord of my life ?

For I gave to thee my cup filled with all the pain and delight  
that the crushed grapes of my heart had surrendered,

I wove with the rhythm of colours and songs the cover for  
thy bed,  
and with the molten gold of my desires  
I fashioned playthings for thy passing hours.

I know not why thou chosest me for thy partner,  
Lord of my life !  
Didst thou store my days and nights,  
my deeds and dreams for the alchemy of thy art,  
and string in the chain of thy music my songs of autumn  
and spring,  
and gather the flowers from my mature moments for thy  
crown ?  
I see thine eyes gazing at the dark of my heart,  
Lord of my life !  
I wonder if my failures and wrongs are forgiven,  
For many were my days without service  
and nights of forgetfulness ;  
Futile were the flowers that faded in the shade not offered to  
thee.

Often the tired strings of my lute  
Slackened at the strain of thy tunes.  
And often at the ruin of wasted hours  
my desolate evenings were filled with tears.

But my days come to their end at last,  
Lord of my life,  
While my arms round thee grow limp,  
my kisses losing their truth.  
Then break up the meeting of this languid day  
Renew the old in me with fresh forms of delight ;  
and let the wedding come once again  
in a new ceremony of life.

“ When from the original fount in the depths of  
the Universe,” wrote Rabindra Nath with regard  
to a poem which foreshadowed the mood of the  
*Jivan-devata*, “ streams of melody are sent forth

abroad, their echo is reflected into our hearts from the faces of our beloved and the other beauteous things around us." When the Lord of the poet's life is once enthroned on his seat of majesty in the kingdom of song, all the elements which had lived as outlaws in the external world must come to offer their homage to the new deity. Each element of the Universe is thus wedded to his spirit.

The poet has a few doubts and fears about the integrity of his gift as he tries to fit it to every ordinary circumstance, but they soon disappear, and then in the tranquil assurance of his sustained enjoyment of his genius, his spirit becomes a symbol of beauty itself. He has sung to this beauty in *Urvasi*, a poem destined to immortality for the sublimity of its conception as for the sheer vigour of its imagery. I have not the space to cite it complete, but I quote a stanza :

From age to age thou hast been the world's beloved,

O unsurpassed in loveliness *Urvasi* !

Breaking their meditation, sages lay at thy feet the fruits of  
their penance ;

Smitten with thy glance, the three worlds grow restless with  
youth ;

The blinding winds blow thine intoxicating fragrance around ;  
Like the black bee, honey-drunken, the infatuated poet  
wanders with greedy heart,

Lifting chants of wild jubilation !

While thou . . . thou goest with, with jingling anklets and  
waving skirts

Restless as lightning !

## IV

The fourth phase of Rabindra Nath's life and work began when the *Jivan-devata* began to merge into the poet's "deep and intimate communion with God."

The process through which this came about was long and protracted. The poet was looking back into the very foundations of his being, in order, perhaps, to muster strength enough to run the last lap in his race towards his goal. "He has learnt to trust his *Jivan-devata*," says Mr. Thompson aptly, and "plays for a space, between the two great activities, that of his earlier worship of Beauty, and the one about to begin, of worship of God." Drama, verse, lyric, narrative humorous, natural, social, political, flowed from his pen with an abundance only to be matched by the prolific writing of his early youth. For our purposes, however, none of this poetry has much significance, except perhaps the light verse which is shot through, in Ajit Kumar Chakravarti's phrase, with "a mockery of his own pain":

O mad, superbly drunk,  
If you kick open your doors and play the fool in public ;  
If you empty your bag in a night, and snap your fingers at  
prudence ;  
If you walk in curious paths and play with useless things ;  
Reck not rhyme nor reason ;  
If unfurling your sails before the storm, you snap the rudder  
in two,  
Then I will follow you, comrade, and be drunken and go to the  
dogs.

That is the kind of tragic fooling he indulges in, and quotations could be multiplied to show how restless he is till he realises that the "evening has come, it is time to make up my [last] accounts. The Gods at whose doors I fell, whose feet I worshipped with my life—among them to-day in this eventide I shall judge, knowing not which is and which is not, which remains and which is false."

## V

It was in the year 1900 he sat down to check his ledger. He retired to Shantiniketan, where he founded an *ashrama* (hermitage) which has since developed into the Visvabharati International University. And almost as he opened the book of his life what was his surprise but to read :

The steps that in my play from time to time  
I caught—to-day I hear their tremor run  
One with the world-song, standing in moon and sun.

He realised his oneness with the Infinite even as he heard this tune of eternity. He discovered the key to "the very music of his Being."

The poet's work of this period is well-known to everyone, as it was from the first three or four writings after 1900 that he made the translations presented to the world in 1911 as the *Gitanjali*. (The general trend of this poetry is mystical, suggesting through the use of a metaphor new to

Bengali a new revelation about the traditional Indian God.

What is the new revelation, then ? How does Rabindra Nath define his God ?

God finds Himself by creating.

he writes in the *Stray Birds*, summing up his main position) which, of course, does not, as I have said, fundamentally differ from the Vedic and Upanishadic view, but (which is new because it has assimilated the ancient Indian truth as it has come down through its currency in the dogma of Indian life and become related to the latest conclusions of modern scientific research.

The *Upanishads* crystallised the daring speculations of the hymn of creation in the enquiry which the *Svetasvatara*, in the genuine spirit of search for truth in life, postulates with such unerring precision in the question : " Whence are we born, where do we live, and whither do we go ? "

" Whatever being is born, the moving or the un-moving," says the *Bhagavad Gita*, epitomising the Upanishadic answer, " know thou, O best of the Bharatas, that to be owing to the union of the *Kshetra* and *Kshetragnya* (matter and spirit)."

But what is the nature of matter and spirit ?

The answer to this question is attempted by the ancient thinkers in their definition of the Self, *Atman*, the subject, and of *Brahman*, the object.

Says Prajapati in the *Chandiyoga Upanishad* : " This body is mortal, and all is subject to death. It is the abode of the Self which is immortal and without body. He is the person of the eye ; the eye itself is the instrument of seeing. He who knows let me smell this ; he is the Self, the nose is the instrument of smelling," etc. The Self is this " whole Universe." " The moon and the stars are its eyes, the four quarters of the sky its ears, the wind its breath " (*Mundaka*).

The ultimate Reality *Brahman* is the objective counterpart of the subjective *Atman* : " that from which these things are born, that in which when born they live, and that into which they enter at death, that is the *Brahman* " (*Taittiriya Upanishad*).

This *Brahman* as sensed through the body is *Virat* (the Cosmos) ; as perceived by the wind it is *Hiranyagarbha* (the soul of the world) ; as comprehended by the intellect it is *Ishvara* (God) ; finally, as realised through intuition, it is *Ananda* (Pure Bliss).

Thus the teaching of the *Veda* and the *Vedanta*. Now let us look at the details of Tagore's interpretation. We will find it is an exact parallel of the ancient doctrine in a modern idiom.

(God sought joy in creating this universe, in establishing " duality for His realisation," he says. He split himself into Self and the Not-Self, into *Ishvara* and *Maya*, for :

"It is the joy that creates the separation in order to realise through obstacles the union."

This joy is the mainspring of creation. It is :

"The joy that makes the earth flower over in riotous excess of the grass, the joy that sets the twin brothers, life and death, dancing over the wide world, the joy that sweeps in with the tempest, shaking and waking all life with laughter, the joy that sits still with its tears on the open red lotus of pain, and the joy that knows everything it has upon the dust and knows not a word ! "

Man and nature are, thus, according to him finite-Infinite, partaking of both spirit and matter:)

My beloved is ever in my heart,  
That is why I find him everywhere.

The specific relationship between the two is for Tagore exactly the same as for the Upanishadic sages. (The soul of nature is the outer aspect of the inner reality, and just as the Vedic poets proclaimed the identity of the *atman*, the self, with *Brahman*, nature, and built up the entire fabric of the sacrificial rites on the assumption that the elements of the rite are one with the elements of the Universe (the priest allying himself with Nature in all her moods, by making the syllables of the *mantras* represent the seasons, the details of the sacrificial hearth signify the organs of the human body, the number of oblations denote the months), so our poet regards the world around him as a



"fairy universe where stars talk and the sky stoops down to answer him, and all nature comes to his window with trays of bright toys."

God is in nature and the poet communes with him :

" I woke and found his letter with the morning. When the night grows still and the stars come out one by one I will spread it on my lap and stay silent. The rustling leaves will read it to me aloud, the rushing stream will chant it, and the seven wise stars will sing it to me from the sky."

The realisation of the Absolute, *Ananda*, as against the sensing of the Cosmos or perceiving it, is, as we have seen, brought about in the *Upanishads* through the inner sense, i.e. intuition. Rabindra Nath confirms that truth in a pregnant passage of that testament of his faith which preceded the *Religion of Man*, the *Sadhana* : " The vision of the Supreme One in our soul is a direct and immediate intuition, not based on any ratiocination or demonstration at all. Intellect is like a railway station, but the station platform is not our home. It is only a step in the process of comprehending reality." And it is a very ineffective step indeed, because the Infinite, the Unconditioned, cannot be expressed in finite terms. The way to enlightenment, to self-realisation, lies along a very thorny path : " Exceeding great is the toil of those," says the *Bhagavad Gita*, " whose mind is attached to the Unshown ; for the Unshown way

is painfully worn by those that wear the body." "But as for those who, having cast all works on Me, worship Me in meditation, with whole-hearted *yoga* . . . these speedily I lift up from the sea of life and death, O Partha, their minds being set on Me." Says Tagore :

"The traveller has to knock at every alien door to come to his own, and one has to wander through all the outer worlds to reach the innermost shrine at the end."

The influence of the *Gita's* idealistic humanism has been very profound on the poet, and as would seem from the above, he thoroughly acquiesces in the way, the way of having cast all works on God as the way of realisation. But the limitations of his finitude prevent him from attaining the ideal, and at the best he has to content himself by crying as a child for his mother, as a lover for his beloved :

I want thee, only thee.

Meanwhile, however, the practice of his art affords him the solace of the belief that he is playing hide and seek with Reality. ("In art," he has said in one of his lectures, "the person in us is sending its messages to the Supreme person, who reveals Himself to us in a world of endless beauty across the lightless world of facts.") The millions of his admirers who have read in his poetry the hopes, the fears, the aspirations of their own in-

articulate souls, know how potent, how vital those messages are, how in them the littlest and the most trivial of human wishes and desires have defined themselves in a pure and universal symbology.

As a quarter of a century ago, when his first mood crystallised, and he stood, the very music of his being, the perfect artist, evoking a perfect harmony through his song of God, so even to-day, undulled by age, fresh and inspired with an ever new inspiration, he stands, "his soul," to use his own words, "aching for experience in [the world's] endless rhythm of lines and colours, music and movements, hints and whispers, and [in] all suggestion of the inexpressible [which] finds its harmony in the ceaseless longing of the human heart to make the Person manifest in its own creations."

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## MUHAMMAD IQBAL

MUHAMMAD IQBAL is by far the most imposing Musalman literary figure of modern times. A great poet, and a profound philosopher, he has been indirectly responsible not only for a prodigious share in strengthening the backbone of the Indian literary and national revival, but also for supplying to Turkey, Persia, Egypt, Afghanistan, Arabia, and almost all Muslim societies, the inspiration of a poetic-philosophic consciousness during the process of their regeneration.

Iqbal was born in 1876 at Sialkot, Punjab, into a middle-class Muslim family of strong sufi-istic tendencies, a fact which is significant in view of the influence on him of Maulana Jalal-ud-Din Rumi and other mystical poets of Persia. As a child he attended a local Government school at Sialkot, and had the good fortune to sit at the feet of an old refined Persian and Arabic scholar, Shams-ul-Ulema (the Sun of the Learned), Maulana Sayyid Mir Hasan, who, like a few other old-world people, was carrying on the traditions of Mughal culture in the India of the Victorian age ; and it was under the tutorship of this kindly sage that there was kindled in the poet the love of Per-

sian literature which is the conspicuous feature of his mature writing.

Like most Indian youths of his day, Iqbal also read voraciously in Ghalib, Zok, Mir, Hali, and other Urdu poets, who had already built up a vast body of poetical literature on the debris of the new language which had grown up in the mixed camps of Mughal civil and military life. It seems that it was his study of these poets that first inspired him into writing poetry himself, for he is known as a boy to have sent some of his verses for correction to Nawab Mirza Khan Dag Dihlawi, the greatest Hindustani poet of his day, and sometime tutor to the Nizam of Hyderabad, which that illustrious poet laureate returned with the remark that there was not much room for correction.

The fine efflorescence of Iqbal's genius did not appear, however, till he came as an undergraduate to the university town of Lahore ; for here in the seething atmosphere of student life he had increased facilities for social intercourse and wider experience of things, and the bud bloomed forth into a full flower at the magic touch of knowledge. From the very beginning of his career, probably on account of the sufi-istic atmosphere which surrounded the home of his parents, Iqbal had been acutely interested in philosophical speculation. On coming to Lahore, he sought naturally the guidance of the late Sir Thomas Arnold, the celebrated Orientalist who had come to teach at the

University of North India with the reputation of a scholar deeply interested in Islam, and as one who had already stimulated many an Indian intellect to the study of Eastern thought and culture at the Muslim University of Aligarh. That guidance was unstintedly placed at his disposal, and Iqbal's poem to Arnold is an eloquent record of his indebtedness to this learned and lovable teacher.

It was at this time, about the beginning of the twentieth century, that Iqbal's poetic activity really began, for it was on coming to Lahore that he uttered those exquisite lines—

Divine grace the dew of remorse has gathered,  
Thinking them pearls, as they studded my forehead,

which attracted the attention of the cultured world towards him. Nawab Sir Zulfiqar Ali Khan of Malerkotta has paid a glowing tribute to the poet in his comment on these lines :

“In one sublime verse the poet depicts the angelic sanctity of a soul after its resurrection. How the divine love rejoices to see the ennobling virtue of remorse. Supremely exquisite is the analogy of drops of perspiration to pearls whose purity resembles the chastity of awakened conscience. The poetic euphony which embellishes the dignity of the human soul with incomparable vesture lays claim to be enjoyed as a free work of art.”

It is said that many a poet and critic thought of

laying down their pens in defeat when they heard that the author of this verse was a young man newly arrived at Lahore, and they unanimously proclaimed the coming into the field of Hindustani poetry of the greatest force since Ghalib.

From now onwards Iqbal frequently began to be dragged by his college friends to *mushairas* (poetical festivals that are held every now and then all over Northern India), and he began to write more consistently than he had done during his schooldays at Sialkot. At one of these *mushairas* he read his well-known poem on the Himalayas, written partly under English and partly under Persian influences, and his reputation emerged from its first stronghold in the hearts of the student community to become a national name. The strong flavour of patriotism that distinguished it had struck a new note in Indian poetry. Added to this was Iqbal's powerful lyric gift. The Himalayas captured the tongue of the nation, so that, like many of his later songs, notably the one about India which has become the Indian national anthem, it spread throughout the length and breadth of Hindustan with the rapidity and intensity of a cyclone, and the lanes and alleys of village, town, and city resounded with the echoes of little boys and girls, who ran about wildly singing it in deafening choruses. Iqbal was at once greeted as the foremost prophet of the national awakening.

Looking at the first authentic period of Iqbal's poetic activity, which begins about 1901 when he came to Lahore, and lasts till 1905 when he sailed for England to prosecute higher studies there, one finds that although the English and Persian influences so peculiarly noticeable in the poem on the Himalayas are not perfectly assimilated, the poet has already achieved that mastery of conception and expression which is the seal of finality in art. Already there is a throbbing, palpitating rhythm in his song, already he marches with a majestic dignity, with his power of thought beautifully in tune with his silver speech, so that this, his first utterance, is, I think, also his noblest; nowhere else, except in his later Persian verse, does he rise quite so high. No doubt many of these poems are expressly stated to be written on English models—for instance, *Hamdardi* (Sympathy) is fashioned on Cowper, *Piam-i-Subha* (The Message of the Morning) on Longfellow, *Ishk aur Mot* (Love and Death) on Tennyson, *Rukhsat-i Bazm-Jahan* (Farewell, O World), and *Ek Paha-aur Ek Gulehri* (The Squirrel and the Mountain) on Emerson; but such is the charm, the loveliness, of that extravagant metaphor and imagery which in the true Oriental manner breaks, as it were, the limits of space and time in its fantastic flights, that one sits caught and imprisoned in the meshes of his harmony, careless as to the sources of his complicated rhythm.



In one of his Urdu poems (a prayer of the poet uttered at the pious moments of dawn, to breathe the secret of his newly awakened consciousness) the words of the song are so finely woven on the chain of music that it has become a sort of rosary to many of his admirers, in telling which they lose themselves in the realms of a boundless joy. Who would not lose himself by saying such a prayer as this :

When the world-illuminating Sun  
Rushed upon night, like a brigand,  
My weeping bedewed the face of the rose,  
My tears washed sleep away from the eyes of the narcissus,  
My passion waked the grass and made it grow . . .  
My being was an unfinished statue,  
Uncomely, worthless, and good for nothing.  
Love chiselled me ; I became a man  
And gained knowledge of the nature of the Universe,  
I have seen the movement of the sinews of the sky,  
And the blood coursing in the veins of the moon.

Iqbal's early success depended, however, not only on the delicacy and refinement of his musical sentiments, but on his attempting to perform another remarkable feat. He is trying to enrich the poor vocabulary of Urdu by introducing into it the touching metaphors and the tender images of Persian as well as of Punjabi and other Indian dialects. He is seeking to mould Urdu into shape, to modernise it, because he dreams of a national India possessing a national language. In one of

his verses he draws a true picture of the state of Urdu of his day :

The comb seeks still the locks of Urdu to tame,  
This wild-hearted moth still burns on the flame ;

and in his homage to the spirits of Ghalib and Dag, the last two greatest names in Urdu poetry, he consciously proclaims himself their true successor, imposing on himself the task of reforming the language which they before him had striven to perfect.

The hardships involved in achieving this ideal which Iqbal placed before himself are clearly reflected throughout the verses of his first period. But he is a born fighter, a vigorous propagandist, and he never swerves an inch from his course in the face of obstacles and impediments. Whenever he feels he is in difficulties, he raises his pen to relate himself to his forerunners in the same cause. His poem to Sir Sayyid Ahmad, the great educationist who united the ideals of Western universities and the spirit of the ancient *mad-rassas* (schools) and *ashrams* (hermitages) of the East in founding the University of Aligarh, and who himself fixed the conventions of Hindustani prose, is, for instance, written in such a state of mind, and it is Iqbal's noblest Indian dedicatory poem, because it suited the poet to write it.

There is one other thing Iqbal wants to do. He wants to express his vehement support of the

belief then generally held in India that the blending of the East and West would produce a better world. Whatever contribution the Western nations might make to further this ideal, Iqbal believed he would answer for India, where the ideal was already beginning to be fulfilled, and seemed most possible of realisation. India must, however, be adequately prepared for this formidable task by being rid of its social evils, and its diverse elements must be united. Hoping to weld its heterogeneous forces into a solid whole, Iqbal sings of "our India which lives while Greece and Rome and Egypt lie dead." Indians begin to feel proud of themselves on hearing this, and the strong suggestion issuing from the poet's virile pen transmutes them into a self-conscious nation. Seeking to remove racial and communal hatred, he sings of the *Nia-Shiwala* (the New Temple) of universal worship, where—

Our pilgrimage will be higher than all the pilgrimages of this  
world,  
We will raise the pinnacles of our temple to meet the very edge  
of the sky,  
We will rise every morning to sing sweet hymns,  
We will dispense to all worshippers the wine of love.

For—

Power and peace is in the songs of the devoted,  
The true end of the men of earth is to love each other.

II

In 1905 the poet booked a passage to England. It was a fortunate circumstance that, immediately on arriving, he came into contact with such outstanding men as McTaggart, the Hegelian, then at the height of his fame as a philosopher ; E. G. Browne, the brilliant historian of Persian literature ; and Professor R. A. Nicholson, the translator of his long philosophical poem, the *Asrar-i-Khudi* (The Secrets of the Self). The two important preoccupations of his soul in his younger days, philosophy and Persian literature, which had been clouded by the dust of nationalism that his pen had raised, emerged into a new life, and matured under the influence of these friends. The lectures of McTaggart taught him the scientific mode of philosophising, which he, like most other students from the Indian soil, lacked ; and the friendship of Browne and Nicholson moulded into final shape the vast knowledge of Persian he had already amassed by his discursive studies at home.

The outcome of his researches in England was an essay on the "Development of Persian Thought," later accepted by the University of Munich for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, an illuminating little treatise, soundly written, and important, not only because it is still the only book on the history of Persian philosophy, but also in view of Iqbal's philosophical Persian

poems, to the writing of which he was soon to dedicate all his fiery genius.

During the period of his stay in Europe, Iqbal wrote very little poetry. Most of what he wrote, however, betrays the intense influence on him of Persian romanticism. The poet seems to have been at that critical period of life when the beauty of the child's dream-world of fancy becomes the beauty of the heart's passionate desire, crying for expression and fulfilment by union with concrete objects. Love dominates this phase of Iqbal's poetry. He is seeking at first to analyse all its implications in the traditional young poet's way. What is love ? he asks himself. What is the truth in beauty ? What is the relation of beauty and love ? What is fulfilment ? All the incidental situations that arise in the everyday thoughts of lovers claim his attention. He bursts into a rhapsody, *on seeing a cat in her lap* ; he celebrates *the splendour of her beauty* ; he writes *messages of love*, and weeps on the irony of *separation*, idolises the moon and the stars, wakes up at dawn to see his earthly beloved enshrined in every particle of nature, and sings to the tune of his palpitating heart tossed and buffeted by the angry waves of passion in the stormy sea of love. When, however, the futile attempt has been made to fathom the depths of that sea and to battle with its waves, the path is clear for the poet to soar up from earth to heaven.

The Oriental poet does not regard earthly love as real. For him it is an illusion which has only enough of the real in it to lead him to God, Whose love alone is true and desirable. Iqbal has a glimpse of the secret. So he writes in memory of that God-intoxicated genius of the India of the nineteenth century, Swami Ram Tirath, still connected in the minds of America as one of the greatest Hindus who brought the spiritual message of the East to them ; and the poet has sheltered himself under the wings of the phoenix, who is going to bring him immortality. In poems like *Kali* (Bud), *Salimi*, *Tanhai* (Solitude), and *An Evening on River Neckar near Heidelberg*, Iqbal seems already to have emancipated himself from the love bound by the circumstances of space and time, and to have reached the realms of divine love.

But as soon as the ecstasy of love's youthful fire had burnt itself out, and as soon as the phoenix of divine love arose from the ashes, he found the atmosphere of Europe uncongenial to him. The outcome of his revolt was the poem in which he sounded a prophetic warning to Western nations of the dangers inherent in their blind devotion to matter and the enjoyment of the senses. In the following translation of this poem one can perceive a prologue to his own proclamation of the new Muslim religious and political theocracy in his later writings :

The veil shall soon be lifted, the One Beloved to disclose,  
 The secret hidden behind love's nature to expose.  
 No longer shall Saqi to secret drinkers wine dispense,  
 The world shall soon a tavern be, openly shall wine be served  
 hence.

In towns shall rest those who wildly wandered,  
 Their naked feet in meadows fresh shall be comfortable  
 rendered.

Hejaz in silence has to anxious ears proclaimed  
 That God's old compact with desert dwellers shall be re-  
 ordained.

The lion which sprang from the wilds and shattered Rome,  
 The angels say, shall be reborn in its old home. \*  
 O ye who in Western lands reside, learn, God's home is not a  
 business concern,

The gold you think is pure, soon shall impure turn.

A suicide's death awaits your civilisation,

A slender bough to rest a nest is no safe position.

In angry seas, where storms and furies rage, the ant shall ride,  
 Contemptible, but safe, in a frail rose-leaf caravan it shall  
 stride.

For when one day to the dove I breathed, "The freemen here  
 are slaves to earth,"

Suddenly the buds cried out, "He has discovered the secret of  
 our birth."

It was the last poem that Iqbal wrote in Europe, and may fitly be considered his parting word to the West; and, though not very complimentary, it seeks to diagnose its disease with precision. "You have made of God's home a shop," he says to the Western people. "You have corrupted your civilisation; you will soon commit suicide with the very weapons with which you have forged your destinies." And if there is hardly a word of doubt in his casting the horoscope of Europe, his message of hope to the Orient, too, is

extended with an almost baffling sureness and certainty of the promise of that greatness which it was soon to achieve. He had felt the inner rhythm of the rising Eastern tide, and he could talk about its future with authority. "A new era is about to begin," he says to Asia. He heralds a new awakening. The world shall soon become a tavern where everyone will come to drink the wine of ideas, for all men are equal before God. Then there will no longer be an intellectual aristocracy usurping all rights to knowledge. The culture of the East, he explains—the little, but redoubtable ant—shall dominate history once more.

The centre of this cultural renaissance will, of course, be Hejaz, for it was there that the prophet's faith first flourished in its pure simplicity ; and its motive force will be the compact God made with the people of Arabia in the holy Koran : "God has promised to those of you who believe and do the things that are right that He will cause them to be the rulers of the earth, as He made those who were before them, and that He will establish for them that religion which He has chosen for them, and that after their fears He will give them security in exchange." This divine promise, Iqbal believed, made the Arabs the masters of the world in the seventh century ; this and other precepts kept their star in ascendance so long as they followed them. But they forgot themselves, he thinks, when their



religious zeal gave place to the evils which luxury and wealth brought to the courts of the Caliphs ; they forgot the exhortation in the Koran which enjoins the faithful "to be virtuous, and God commands you to be scrupulously just, and act in a manner that people may be grateful to you." Now Iqbal announces that the believers would rediscover the meaning of those old ideals and rise to form an ideal Muslim Empire—a Utopia with its pivot at Mecca, to which all Muslims will look up as brothers belonging to a common faith, in love with Allah, and devoted to the prophets.

This was the Muezzin's call, the call of the Muezzin of the new Ka'aba. He would go home to the East and stand on the highest pinnacle of the mosque of glory, and day and night call the forgetful men and women of the old faith to prayer with his new message of love and life. The full implication of Iqbal's call was not yet worked out. As soon, however, as he reached India in 1908 he set to work to elaborate his plan, and since then each successive volume of verse that has come from him has been concerned in some way or other with the furtherance of the ideal he conceived in Europe.

### III

The love of Persian literature which Iqbal's studies both in India and England had fostered in

him was bound sooner or later to come out openly. He realised about this time that Urdu was still too poor and immature a language to be made the vehicle of a philosophy such as he had lately conceived, and he knew, too, that he had now to appeal to the whole Muslim world and not only to the Muslims of India. So while continuing to write occasionally in his native language for the benefit of his co-religionists at home, he adopted Persian to express himself to the rest of the Muslim world.

He has published four volumes of Persian verse—the *Asrar-i-Khudi* (The Secrets of the Self), the *Ramuz-i-Bekhudi* (The Mysteries of Selflessness), the *Pyam-i-Mashrik* (The Message of the East), the *Zabur-i-Ajm* (The Psalm of Persia)—all of which embody, in the words of Professor Nicholson, “a new and inspiring song, a fiery incantation scattering ashes and sparks and bidding fair to be the ‘trumpet of a prophecy.’”

On the publication of Professor Nicholson's English translation of the first of Iqbal's volumes of philosophical poetry, the *Asrar-i-Khudi*, Mr. Herbert Read, reviewing it, together with the works of some Western poets, pointed out with remarkable insight one of the most important influences on Iqbal's mature poetry, that of Walt Whitman's ideal of pragmatism, and wrote:

“This ideal of Whitman's is a critical ideal of workability, of direct use. Applying it here and

now, I can think of only one living poet who in any way sustains the test, and almost necessarily he is not of our race and creed. I mean Muḥammad Iqbal, whose poem, *Asrar-i-Khudi* (the Secrets of the Self), has recently been translated from the original Persian by Dr. Reynold Nicholson and published by Macmillan. Whilst our native poetasters were rhyming to their intimate coteries about cats and cornercrakes and other homely or unusual variations of a Keatsian theme, there was published in Lahore this poem, which we are told has taken by storm the younger generation of Indian Muslims. 'Iqbal,' writes one of them, 'has come amongst us as a Messiah and has stirred the dead with life.' And what catch-penny nostrum, you will ask, has thus appealed to the covetous hearts of the market-place? You will then be told, as I tell you now, that no nostrum, neither of the jingo nor of the salvationist, has wrought the wonder, but a poem that crystallises in its beauty the most essential phases of modern philosophy, making a unity of faith out of its multiplicity of ideas, a universal inspiration out of the esoteric logic of the schools."

Mr. Read's tribute, coming as it does from one of the profoundest of Western poets and critics, is a compliment to Iqbal of which he may deservedly be proud. The poem is indeed one of the most remarkable attempts yet made to present a vigorous philosophy in the garb of poetry. But

what, it may be asked, is this philosophy? What is the nature of Iqbal's prophecy?

The answer to this question, which is poetically given in the pages of the *Asrar-i-Khudi* and the *Ramuz-i-Bekhudi*, and resuscitated in the two later works, the *Pyam-i-Mashrik* and the *Zabur-i-Ajm*, is clearly set down in a short account of his philosophy written by Iqbal at the request of his translator, and included in the introduction of the English rendering of *Asrar*. I shall try to summarise the main points of Iqbal's statement below:

Reality is a process of becoming or change, not a state of being nor an eternally fixed entity. The Hegelian absolute, the Vedantic Brahma, and the Sufi God, is a fiction of the mind, an hallucination of the neurotic imagination. As against the Absolute, the finite centres of experience, which Bradley condemned as infected with relativity, are for Iqbal the fundamental facts of the universe. All life is individual; there is no such thing as a universal life; God Himself is an individual. He is the most supreme individual. Individuals partake of the nature of God. Man not only absorbs the world of matter by mastering it; he absorbs God Himself into his Ego by assimilating divine attributes. Love, which in its highest form "is the creation of desires and ideals" and the endeavour to realise them, is the essence of life. Desires are good or bad according as they

strengthen or weaken the individual Ego, the personality. The individual has to be a member of the ideal community of Islam in order to realise perfection, because Islam is immortal, and by a whole-hearted devotion to it the individual will lose himself in the Muslim kingdom of God upon earth.

These hard bare products of metaphysical speculation are threaded into a necklace of pure pearls in the *Asrar* and the *Ramuz*, so that their appeal is not to the head but to the heart. His thoughts no longer remain the bare stuff such as logic is made of, but assume all the brightest and most glowing hues of flowers in a beautiful garden.

Conscious of his own high destiny, the poet first proclaims himself a prophet and apostle, not of this age, but of to-morrow :

I am waiting for the votaries that arise at dawn !  
Oh, happy they who shall worship my fire !  
I have no need of the ear of to-day.  
I am the voice of the poet of to-morrow.

Then, Persian fashion, he invokes the Saqi " to fill his cup with wine and pour moonbeams into the dark night of his thought " :

That I may lead home the wanderer  
And imbue the idle looker-on with restless impatience,  
And advance hotly on a new quest  
And become known as the champion of a new spirit.

He indicates the source of his inspiration. It is Maulana Jalal-ud-Din Rumi, the great mystical poet of Persia :

'Twas night ; my heart would fain lament,  
The silence was filled with my cries to God,  
I was complaining of the sorrows of the world  
And bewailing the emptiness of my cup ;  
At last mine eyes could endure no more,  
Broken with fatigue, it went to sleep.  
Then appeared the Master, formed in the mould of truth,  
Who wrote the Koran of Persia ;  
He said, " O frenzied lover,  
Take a draught of love's pure wine,  
Strike the chords of thine heart and loose a tumultuous  
strain,  
Dash thine head against the cupping glass and thine eyes  
against the lancet."

And although the pantheistic " beauty-worship-  
ping and love-making " of Jalal-ud-Din and his  
poetising are not the aim of this *masnavi*, as Iqbal  
calls his *Asrar*, evidently modelled on Rumi's  
famous poem, he pays due tribute to his master :

Inspired by the genius of the Master of Rum,  
I rehearse the sealed book of the secret lore ;  
His soul is the source of the flames ;  
I am but as the spark that gleams for a moment ;  
His burning candle consumed me, the moth ;  
His wine overwhelmed my goblet ;  
The Master of Rum transmutes my earth to gold,  
And clothes my barren dust with beauty.

The cardinal principles of his philosophy are  
explained thus :

The form of existence is an effect of the Self ;  
Whatsoever thou seest is a secret of the Self.

Action is the mainspring of a life seeking to perfect the Self :

Subject, object, means and causes—  
They all exist for the purpose of action.

“ Flower out, manifest thyself by forming desires, O Individual,” he seems to exhort, for—

We live by forming ideals,  
We glow with the sunbeams of desire.

Love is the source of all ideals, and the means of their realisation :

The luminous point whose name is the Self  
Is the life spark beneath our dust ;  
By love it is made more lasting,  
More living, more burning, more flowing ;  
From love proceeds the radiance of its being  
And the development of its unknown possibilities ;  
Its nature gathers fire from love ;  
Love instructs it to illumine the world.

Be not weak, do not beg or ask, is his advice to the ideal Muslim, for the Self is weakened by asking :

“ Be a man of honour, and, like the bubble, keep thy cup inverted ever in the midst of the sea ! ”

As an uncompromising critic of absolute idealism Iqbal vehemently denounces “ Plato, the prime ascetic and sage,” as “ one of that ancient flock of sheep,” and makes the Sheikh in his story

of the Sheikh and the Brahman address the Hindu priest thus :

O wanderer in the lofty sky,  
Pledge thyself to be true for a little to this earth.  
Thou hast lost thy way in the wilderness of speculation,  
Thy fearless thought has passed beyond heaven.

The final invocation, a passionately ecstatic appeal of the wild and insane lover of free souls, of unlimited, infinite, and perfect minds, is a fitting epilogue to the battle which Iqbal has waged against the shackles of slavery to dogmas through sixteen hundred verses of intense beauty :

O thou that art as the soul in the body of the universe,  
Thou art our soul and thou art ever fleeing from us,  
Thou breakest music into life's lute ;  
Life envies death when death is for thy sake.  
Once more bring comfort to our sad hearts,  
Once more dwell in our breasts,  
Once more let us hear thy call to honour,  
Strengthen our weak love.

#### IV

The *Pyam-i-Mashrik*, written in response to Goethe's *West-Oestlicher Divan*, consisting of short poems grouped together very much on the lines of its prototype, and the *Zabur-i-Ajm*, a long poem comprising two parts, reiterate the philosophical position of the *Asrar* and *Ramuz*, only working it out with more detail, and relating it to other systems of thought.



The dedicatory poem to Amir Amanullah of Afghanistan in the *Pyam* declares Iqbal's intention in writing that book :

The sage of the West, the German poet who was fascinated  
by the charms of Persia,  
Depicted those coy and winsome beauties, and gave the East  
a greeting from Europe.  
In reply to him I have composed the *Pyam-i-Mashrik*,  
I have shed moonbeams on the evening of the East.

So deep does Iqbal dive into the labyrinth of the sea of thought for pearls that his books become rather difficult to understand. A letter written to the poet by one of his friends may suggest the nature of the complexities. It runs :

"One must have read much, pondered much, doubted much, to be able to soar in thought to the heights to which you, in your easy manner, wish to take your readers. The work is only for those who are deeply conversant with the game of getting one's self wilfully entangled, for those who make it an article of faith to go on from one trap to another. You, it seems, have explored the whole world of human emotions from the highest ecstasy to the darkest doubt. In your case it may be said with perfect truth *dast az yak band ta uftad do band digar* that you are driving us from pillar to post. We others who have neither felt much nor seen much have not the courage or qualifications to abide in this super-spiritual world. Still occasionally we peer in."

There is an echo of the old, old theme of the *Asrar* and *Ramuz* in the *Pyam*, which the poet drives home with ever new power :

Knowest thou life's secret ? Neither seek nor take  
A heart unwounded by the thorn, Desire.  
Live as the mountain, self-secure and strong,  
Not as the sticks and straws that dance along ;  
For fierce is the wind and merciless is the fire.

*Life and Action*, a poem in reply to Heine's *Fragen*, also recalls the *Asrar* doctrine :

" I have lived a long, long while," said the fallen shore.  
" What I am I know as ill as I knew of yore."  
Then swiftly advanced a wave, from the sea upshot ;  
" If I roll, I am," it said ; " if I rest, I am not."

Time, which in the *Asrar* was declared to be everlasting, is the subject of a melodious song from which I shall quote two stanzas :

Sun and stars in my bosom I hold ;  
By me, who am nothing, thou art ensouled.  
In light and in darkness, in city and wold,  
I am pain, I am balm, I am life manifold.  
Destroyer, quickener, I from of old.

Chengiz, Timur, specks of my dust they came,  
And Europe's turmoil is a spark of my flame,  
Blood of his heart my spring flowers claim,  
Hell fire and Paradise I, be it told.

Iqbal's criticism of Western life and thought is both amusing and instructive. His general complaint against it is that—

Amassing lore, thou hast lost thy heart to-day.  
Ah, what a precious boon thou hast given away !

The League of Nations is described with peculiar irony :

To the end that wars may cease on this old planet, the  
suffering

Peoples of the world have founded a new institution.

So far as I can see, it amounts to this : a number of under-  
takers have

Formed a company to allot the graves !

“ Hegel,” writes Iqbal, “ is a hen that by a dint of enthusiasm lays eggs without association with the cock.” Nietzsche, with “ whose will to power,” meaning “ the fullest possible realisation of a complete self-reliant personality,” Iqbal has much sympathy, is nevertheless attacked as the “ madman of the European china-shop ” because he is an atheist :

If song thou crave, flee from him ! Thunder roars in the  
reed of his pen.

He plunged a lancet into Europe's heart ;

His hand is red with the blood of the cross.

He reared a pagoda on the ruins of the Temple.

His heart is a true-believer, but his brain is an infidel.

Burn thyself in the fire of Nimrod,

For the garden of Abraham is produced from fire.

Iqbal renders Bergson's message thus :

- . If thou wouldst read life as an open book,  
Be not a spark divided from the brand,  
Bring the familiar eye, the friendly look,  
Nor visit stranger-like thy native land.  
O thou by vain imaginings befooled,  
Get thee a reason which the heart hath schooled.

Einstein is styled "the hierophant of light, the descendant of Moses and Aaron, who has revived the religion of Zoroaster." Lenin, proclaiming the triumph of Communism to Kaiser Wilhelm, gets the retort that the people have only exchanged one master for another: "Shirin never lacks a lover; if it be not Khusrau, then it is Farhad."

Iqbal's leanings towards Socialism are suggested by the dialogue between *Comte and the Workman*, and the *Workman's Song*; from which last I quote a stanza:

Clad in cotton rags I toil as a slave for hire  
To earn for an idle master his silk attire.  
The Governor's ruby seal 'tis my sweat that buys,  
His horse is gemmed with tears from my children's eyes.

Severe as are his judgments of the West, he is, however, no ungrateful wretch, as is evident from this poem to England:

An Eastern tasted once the wine in Europe's glass,  
No wonder if he broke old vows in reckless glee.  
The blood came surging up in the veins of his new-born  
thought.  
Predestination's bond slave, he learnt that man is free.  
Let not thy soul be vexed with the drunkard's noise and rout!  
O Saqi, tell me fairly who 'twas that broached this jar.  
The scent of the rose showed first the way into the garden,  
Else how should the nightingale have known that roses are?

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## PURAN SINGH

AMONG the poets of the New India, Puran Singh has a place, as the chief representative of that remarkable school of poetic-religious ethics which, under the well-known name of Sikhism, goes to inspire about three millions of the peoples of India into a profound belief in the fellowship of man with man and devotion to a personal God.

Puran Singh was born in the year 1881, in a small village near Abbotabad, on the north-western frontier of India. His father was a small Government official, and like all men of this tribe possessed of a bourgeois complacency, which smiled upon every show of individual emotion—regarding common sense as the best rule of life. Puran Singh was more fortunate in his mother. For while his father roamed about most of the year inspecting crops and land records, his mother, quiet and retiring, effaced herself in the love of God and in the service of her children. The poet has paid a glowing tribute to her nobility in an autobiography—in little he gave to his friend and editor in England, Mr. Ernest Rhys :

“Our mother,” he wrote, “did everything for us. She cooked for us, washed our clothes, took

us to the hill streams, and gave us a daily plunge in the crystal, biting, cold water. She took us to the village *Gurdwara* (Sikh temple), made us listen to the hymns of the *Guru* every morning, and generally in the afternoon we all sat listening to the recital of the *Guru Granth* (the Bible of the Sikhs) by the village priest. At night, all alone, we sat together round the fire as my mother and elder sister sat before the spinning-wheels preparing thread for getting some cloth woven by the village weaver of the family. . . . For most of the time mother lived alone. She was by our side, but God alone was by hers. She was equally unafraid of thieves and evil spirits : her courage was extraordinary. The whole village respected her. As you know, that part of the country is full of Pathans (hillmen), and even they admired my mother for her heroic spirit. . . . Our house was always open to poor people, and whoever came to beg of my mother for a suit of clothes or a little money had it. No one was sent away from our door without being given a share of whatever we could give. . . . She would serve her relatives for months, and on occasion nurse the sick and the wounded with her own hands day and night, single-handed and untiring. If she thought a certain thing was good and must be done she did it in spite of the whole world's opposition."

To those who know the matriarchal nature of Indian society, the implications of this first in-

fluence on Puran Singh will be obvious. "The production of children, the nature of those born, and the daily life," said the great lawgiver Manu, "of these matters woman is visibly the cause." So he enjoins all to honour her. In the Tantric scriptures, based on the ideal of woman as the mother of the world, it has been said that woman is the highest spiritual teacher. The initiation of a son into the truths of religion by a mother is accordingly more fruitful than any other.

Puran Singh's mother evidently belonged to that order of womanhood in whom the ancient traditions of India are still preserved intact. She brought him up with that beautiful religiosity of the Indian woman who regards her child as a sacred trust from God. All that Puran Singh did in his life, therefore, was inspired by ideas he had imbibed from her. The poet has told us in his preface to a little volume of legendary stories of the ten masters of Sikhism that he "learnt these tales as a Sikh child from his ancestors." He does not expressly mention his mother there, but we know that it was from her or from those whom she respected and to whom she took him, that he learnt those legends of the lives of the Sikh Gurus. He has entitled another book of religious verse, *The Sisters of the Spinning-Wheel*. He does not give the reason for choosing that title, but we know that his mother and sister are the original sisters of the spinning-wheel whose devotional

melodies and hymn music he sought to arrest in his own song.

Although the family was very poor, it was the will of Puran Singh's mother that he should have a good education. So she sacrificed the freedom of the frontier skies, its purple hills, and silver streams to come and live in the congested city of Rawalpindi: here the boy was put to school. But though he made rapid progress, it was because he had "the knack of keeping his teacher impressed and of getting through exams. with ease." Really he never put his heart into what he was given to study in the curriculum of the Punjab University.

After the silent vigil of many long nights, during which he sat cramming notes while his mother prayed, he matriculated from the local school and went up to Lahore for "higher" education. Here he seems to have missed his mother's presence keenly for a time, as the inner gods she had evoked in him were still dominating. But gradually he receded from the deeper impulses of his consciousness, and dedicating himself to the illusion of success, entered for and won an open scholarship for the study of applied chemistry at the Imperial University, Tokyo, Japan.

Approaching the little island in the Pacific in the spirit of a scholar looking at the workings of industrialism, Puran Singh's gaze was soon attracted by the other Japan—the Japan of lyric



flowers, of lovely *geishas*, and of the Buddha, the Japan of landscape painters, of exquisite dancers, and intricate ceremonials. The result was a sudden revolution in his spirit. It realised Itself. The history of this change and its implications may be narrated in the poet's words :

"I met men of silence," he writes, "men of joy, poets and artists, and [now] I always sought for the hidden riches of the soul wherever I went . . . I gained the new joy of freedom from Self and everything dropped from my hands. I turned a monk. Tears of joy rolled from my eyes, and my words were soft as cherry blossoms dropping in the air. It seemed that I loved everyone and everyone loved me. If Japan was beautiful, people around me saw the evidence in me. A Persian poet says :

"Are you going out to see gardens and roses ?  
What a pity ;  
Open the door of the Heart, enter and see  
What fiery roses bloom within !

"Such was my condition of full youth, lived in supreme innocence ; floods of ecstasy overwhelming me, Buddha before me, behind me, above me, in me. And [there] I met an Indian saint. He touched me with Divine fire, and I became a *Sannyasin* [ascetic] . . . I threw all my books of science and notebooks aside, and started for India. . . . I arrived back full of dreams and

sweet hopes, with which the Hindu *Sannyasi* had mixed thunder and lightning and the wish to be effective for work. But in spite of the yellow robe, I could not forget the 'Nest' which I had left. My mother heard of my arrival at Calcutta, and she lost no time in travelling to Calcutta to find me in that big, crowded city without knowing my address. I wonder now why I did not cry when I first met her after such a long time? It was certainly due to the congealing of my stream of tears which the Hindu *Sannyasi* produced in me. My father was with her. He was deeply hurt at seeing me a monk, though what I did was in the real fulfilment of his metaphysical ideas. He was bitter and sarcastic in his speech to me, but my mother soon reconciled herself to it, sympathised with me, and even admired me for taking the right direction."

He was later persuaded to give up the cloak of renunciation he had borrowed from Swami Ram Tirath, by his mother, who pointed out to him how the godly life can be lived in the very heart of society by the disinterested performance of good deeds, and who drew his attention to the humanistic teaching of Sikhism in comparison to the arid intellectualism of ascetical Hinduism. At the request of his family he also married and adopted a profession—alchemy.

Ardent and enthusiastic as Puran Singh was about everything, his reversion to Sikhism meant

an intense study of the hymns of the *Guru Granth*. He had brought to his researches the results of a wide culture acquired during his stay abroad, and it was natural that he should issue out in original writing to reinterpret the teaching of the Sikh masters. He began to write verse in Punjabi. The success of Rabindra Nath Tagore as an interpreter of Hinduism in Europe led Puran Singh to contemplate English as a medium for some time, but he also kept on writing in Punjabi. During the short period of ten years he published about half a dozen books of Punjabi and English poetry, and died, a much respected sage, in 1931.

The original impulses of Punjabi literature go back to Nanak, who sought, in the early half of the fifteenth century, to reconcile the conflicting creeds of Hinduism and Islam into a new religion. He was gifted with an extraordinary talent for poetry and song, and he went about singing his exquisitely melodious harmonies to the tune of a rebeck played by one of his first friends and disciples, a Muhammadan named Mardana. He would answer people's enquiries in verse, he would refute the arguments of his adversaries in a subtle rhyme, he would sermonise by singing a song, and the doctrines of his belief would steal into people's hearts before they knew they had been converted. His nine successors after his death continued this tradition, and before the last of these died, he appointed the whole series of the

hymns and poems that had thus been collected as the Bible of the Sikh faith, which had in his hands been reduced to a dogmatic creed.

Fifteen years ago Mr. Macauliffe gave to the West the fruits of his vast erudition and pains-taking scholarship in a work of six volumes on the religion of the Sikhs. In the poetry of Puran Singh we have an attempt to render the soul of Sikhism by a Sikh in whose veins flows the blood of those who struggled to establish the truths of this religion.

What, it may be asked, is the exact character of his interpretation ?

We have noted that Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, mixed Islam and Hinduism in a strange motley of new religious habiliments. Puran Singh draws out the truths implicit in this creed. He has rendered the *Japji* hymn, the crux of Nanak's doctrine in the modern idiom :

He is one. He is the first. He is all that is.

His name is truth.

He is the Creator of all,

Fearing naught, striking fear in naught, His

Form on lands and waters is Eternity ; The One Self exist-ent.

Through the grace of His true servant

Continually repeat His Name.

As is obvious, there is here a definition of God which partakes both of the Muhammadan view of Him as " One," " Truth," and " Creator," and of

the *Bhagavad Gita* doctrine that He pervades the whole Universe. Puran Singh insists on this truth and the subsidiary doctrine that God is "known by the Guru's instruction," or mediation given through the vehicle of the Divine word, *Nam*. Having explained the central doctrine of Sikhism, Puran Singh gives us a decorative comment on the history of Sikhism :

The Buddha seated on the white lotus with his Nepal tresses knotted on his brow ;  
 The Christ with his maiden braids, his God-lit eyes, his transfigured face ;  
 Muhammad of the direct glance, with his blazing and cleaving sword, that flashes and kindles the deserts with Heaven's glow ; All Heaven is revealed in them, as a whole nation is in a single man, as a babe is in a mother's soul.

A Man of God stands behind men, to guide and teach ; at his feet they pour out [their souls].  
 Each soul has a divine Man, whether he will or no, behind him, whom he trusts alike for a glimpse of God and His Universe, and for the unfoldment of his own self, trusting where the soul is in distress.  
 The worlds met Him in Krishna, Buddha, in Christ, in Muhammad. But I know Him as my Lord and father, Baba Guru Nanak ; Him have I seen not once but for ten generations.  
 He, in a thousand ways gave signs to us of *Nam*, the Holy One.  
 Taking the three worlds, in His lap He hid himself behind a man ; in his heart He was.  
 Guru Angad, born of Nanak's limbs, was he.  
 I saw him, Guru Angad, concealing the All-father once again in the majestic form of a man, the silver knot of hair on high, the white beard flowing down like a river of light, a tall, ancient, stern man of love and labour, a farmer of men, the owner of *Sat Nam*, Nanak is Amar Das.

Guru Amar Das took on the name and shape of Guru Ram Das, the golden temple of God, the Guru Ram Das, a continuous hymn divine, the world soul, the sweetness of all things.

Guru Ram Das illuminated his son Arjan Dev with Himself. Guru Arjan thrilled creation with the father's voice.

Guru Arjandar produced out of himself Guru Har Gobind, who in turn bowed to Guru Har Rai.

He saw Guru Nanak again in Har Kishen Guru who sighted Him again in "Baba Bakale."

Guru Tegh Bahadur rose and came like a thousand dawns, and in his throat we hear the song of the father, in his form we see the ancient Nanak, whose witnesses are the sky and the stars.

The stars shiver in their seats with joy as he goes riding his splendid steed; his blue-hued horse stamping the world, with thunder and what an almighty thrilling of Creation's Aura!

Guru Gobind Singh is the name of Guru Nanak when he rides. The ancient Huntsman, before whose arrows flies the stag of Death, the old Guru Nanak armed with shield and quiver full of arrows swung around the shoulder and two scimitars hanging below.

He wears the starry crest and carries a hawk on his thumb, and the flag of the true kingship of the heaven.

His flag flutters high in Heaven and angels sing, "Hail Lord."

The wearer of blue garments, the rider of the blue horse!

The commander of the army of his saints, the Sikhs, the disciples made as great by Him as Himself,—the angels, and more than angels, the armies of the Heroes of the world to defend the purposes of God on earth!

Behold! Guru Nanak is seen in Guru Gobind Singh as the flash of the sword, his love takes the shape of arrows, his love is a storm of spears.

Oh! the keen, keen rays of his glance!

Death and bloodshed save the man!

There is paradise below the flying arrows!

There is Anhad (the hidden music of the Infinite) in the twanging of his bows!

There is slumber for the saints on the edge of the swords!

The figure of Love lies arrow-pierced on earth, no blood, but  
milk of love, the Amrit, flows fertilising the world with  
life !

The cold steel falls on the neck of his children,  
But what steels can touch, what fire can burn Nanak ?  
No sword can cut the ray of life.

Death everywhere, death to the right, death to the left, but  
death can touch not a hair of him, nay, not a hair of thou  
who art his own.

Guru Nanak is still with us, a song, a book,  
*Guru Grantha* is in every house.

The doctrine that flows from this poem is a kind of militant pacifism. The first four Sikh Gurus, Angad, Amar Das, Ram Das, and Arjan Dev, were essentially quietists, preaching liberty, equality, and fraternity through the exercise of love and tenderness. During the time of the fifth Guru, Sikhism, growing to be a popular cult, incurred the jealousy of the Mughals. The later Gurus, especially the last two, resorted to arms to defend themselves against the merciless bigotry of Muhammadan iconoclasts. "I wear not arms to kill," said Guru Gobind. "I have no need to act, for all action had ended for me in His love. But so He wills, and I take the body of the flesh to the altar of sacrifice for the sake of the suffering humanity, and rising out of the Guru's heart still asleep, I go forward to die for others." Puran Singh confirms this by saying :

"I am waiting for an age when all swords will be thrown aside by man, walking in the armoury of God, Who alone looks beautiful with a spiritual

sword in His Holy Hand. . . . A spiritual sword, not a weapon of destruction, but a symbol of unconquerableness where religion is concerned. The Sikh fought for supremacy. The Sikh won a spiritual victory. Not for nothing did Gobind Singh endow his followers with the appellation Singh (lion)—‘ the lion quails not.’ ”

In truth, then, in the truth which is righteous and comes from within ; in justice, in the justice of a law made Universal by being exorcised from the heart ; in humanity, in the humanity which relentlessly crushes what is not in accord with the common good ; in God, in the God which is everywhere, do the Sikhs believe. In all these ideals believes Puran Singh.

It has been said that the very danger of pantheism in literature is, that in its search for an identical ideal in all experience, it brings about a certain sameness. That may be so in the case of a conscious artist who, having stylised his subject to the economy of a single gesture and a single symbol, goes on repeating such a gesture and symbol. But in the poetry of Puran Singh, prompted by the intense beauty worshipping of a naïve, Punjabi Sikh, possessed of a boundless sense of God, the danger of monotony is averted by the variety of things behind which he can see the Invisible spirit. No doubt this sometimes makes his writings turgid and dithyrambic and deliberately mystical. Puran Singh, however,



was not a conscious artist who felt but once a year and recorded his emotion in a well-reflected little lyric, designed in a scientifically elaborate metre and trimmed up with all the hackneyed effusions of stylised poetry; he was the poet-priest of his inner gods, who felt poetry, thought poetry, breathed poetry, who saw the Divine urge in a hundred different things, a hundred times a day, and enshrined it in lyrical profusions of a characteristic tropical exuberance. In judging his poetic work, therefore, we must not adopt the ordinary European criteria, but have in mind the Indian ideal which enjoins us to perfect in our hearts the song left imperfect by the artist.

Perhaps because he began to write when the storm and stress of his spiritual effort had been left far behind and he had sublimated some kind of a realisation of his religion, crystallised his beliefs, Puran Singh's work shows hardly any development. We see him always as a full-fledged mystic bursting out with joy and making the poetry of all experience ancillary to some truth of his creed, in the way, to use a metaphor, of the moth both flying round the flame and, burning on the flame, becoming a sacrifice to it.

Thus it was that he always liked to think of himself: "An old man, gay with the youth and the life of his children, is beating a little drum furiously, and shakes his head to make a rhythm as the crowds sit round him and listen. When

the tune sets in, he opens his mouth and sings snatches of song heard or composed by himself." Listen to his music of the rain-month landscape :

The black cloud dances in the sky,  
The poor man's Krishna in the rain-cloud,  
It drenches us with the waters of life ;  
O ! it is drizzling ! drizzling !  
The honey of love dripping ! dripping !  
And the rapture of amour maddens us,  
As the black cloud sings in the sky !

The evening is falling and the colours change. Now in the tradition of those varying musical modes which change to suit themselves to each separate occasion of the day, the song of the old man renders itself in the following variation :

The violet darkness of the cloud is amorous ;  
The darkness of the rainy night unites ;  
See the peacocks lift their fans and dance ;  
The peacock in his love divine ;  
Men and women lie under showers of violet wet light of the monsoon sky ;  
And the fleeting thefts of love are allowed by laws of rapture in our old Bihar.

In the early hours of the morning he hears a *koel* (black cuckoo) sing, and communes with it in a poem singular for its delicacy of spiritual insight, in the extraordinary range and alertness of its vision, in its revelation of the kinship of external nature to those echoes of spiritual reality, which are given only to persons of a superior sensibility and receptive power.

Koel ! what lightning fell ? what singed thy wings ?  
What keeps thee fresh, yet charred ?

Concealed in the mango-leaves, thou singest !  
Thy high-pitched strains wake in my soul a thousand memories !

Why so restless that by thy sparkling shedding notes goes  
forth kindly fire ?

Lo ! The roses are fire which winds and waters catch !

The shades of mangoes burn !

What a rain of sparks out there, O little bird !

Koel ! what lightning fell ? what singed thy wings ?

The fire of love has charred my wings and made me new.

I am restless ! Where is my beloved ?

The sight of mango-blossoms fires me all the more !

The greener the garden, the brighter burns my heart !

My flaming soul asks, " Where ? " Where is my beloved ?

Speak ! speak ! Why are the leaves so still ?

If his nature-touches are almost all similes, his pictures of men and women are all parables disclosing the awakening of the psyche to the consciousness of new worlds of Reality. He sees a man pass by :

A turbaned man ! The owner of the skies !

I hear his footfalls in the garden of my heart,  
my life throbs in his lotus feet !

Eternal are his turban folds of love !

The planets wait as birds in nests at close of night, for the dawn that breaks above them.

He is the king of Creation's heart : he wears the cross of love-grown cotton and love-spun thread and love-woven cloth.

His cross is made of the rolling waves of the sea of light.

Has not the Sun dropped from these turbaned folds ?

He looks at woman :

The woman's promise is a glance, to be a companion of man through eternity in spite of the restlessness of man, is the promise of God, Who ordains all beginnings and ends, Who watches all creations of love in the human heart, as a mother watches her baby child at play.

The child to him—

Is the word of God ;  
Beauty is his speech !

It would be the most delightful of Psychean tasks to illustrate the individual part of his writing by reference to his interpretations of orthodox truths ; suffice it to say, however, that all his work, whether it be the endlessly analogised interpretations of dogma, or the endlessly suggestive personal truth, shows that he can detect no discordant note in the symphony of life.

“ Our idea of the poet,” he once wrote, “ is that of a man who can, by the mere opening of his own eyes, enable ours to see the Divine.” All his life he tried to write up to this ideal. He could hear nothing but the call of God, *Sat Nam*, the true name of the Infinite :

From heart to heart, from lip to lip.

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## SAROJINI NAIDU

SAROJINI NAIDU is affectionately called by her countrymen "the nightingale of India." A higher compliment than this, implied in the poetess's comparison with the celebrated bird that pervades the whole of Hindustani poetry, could not have been paid, and an apter nickname could hardly be imagined. For Sarojini sings of life as the bulbul of the rose, glorying in all its loveliness, longing to realise its many-coloured forms, and weaving melancholy strains about it when the cold, bare, stark brutality of death has robbed it of its warming glow. And although she has adopted a Western language and a Western technique to express herself, she seems to me to be in the main Hindustani tradition of Ghalib, Zok, Mir, Hali, and Iqbal.

Sarojini Chattopadhyaya was born at Hyderabad on February 13th, 1879, to Dr. Aghore Nath Chattopadhyaya and Shrimati Sundari Devi. Her father was descended from an ancient family of Chatterajes Brahmins well known for their patronage of art and literature throughout Bengal. Dr. Aghore Nath took the degree of Doctor of Science at the University of Edinburgh in 1877

and studied at Bonn. On returning to India he established the Nizam College, Hyderabad.

In her charming letters to Mr. Arthur Symons, the poetess has written about the early influences of her childhood. Here is how she came to write poetry :

“ I don’t think,” she writes, “ I had any special hankering to write poetry as a little child, though I was of a very fanciful and dreamy nature. My training under my father’s eye was of a sternly scientific character. He was determined that I should be a great mathematician or a scientist, but the poetic instinct, which I inherited from him and also from my mother (who wrote some lovely Bengali lyrics in her youth), proved stronger. One day, when I was eleven, I was sighing over a sum of algebra : it *wouldn’t* come right ; but instead, a whole poem came to me suddenly. I wrote it down. . . . From that day my poetic career began.”

In 1895 she came to England with a scholarship from the Nizam, and studied some time at King’s College, London, and at Girton. And for a while she travelled in Italy. Her health broke down in 1898, however, and she returned to India in September to marry Dr. Naidu.

As we have seen from her confession, she had been writing verse ever since she was a child. But the circumstances which determined the character of her first considerable poetry hap-

pened during her stay in England. By a very strange coincidence, it was Sir Edmund Gosse, the discoverer of the genius of Toru Dutt, the first poet of the Indian renaissance, who discovered the genius of Sarojini Naidu ; he " showed her " the way, as she has gratefully acknowledged, " to the golden threshold " of poetry. Gosse has told the story of his discovery in the memorable words of his preface to the second volume of Sarojini's poems :

" By some accident—now forgotten, but an accident most fortunate for us—Sarojini was introduced to our house at an early date after her arrival in London, and she soon became one of the most welcome and intimate of our guests. It was natural that one so impetuous and so sympathetic should long conceal from her hosts the facts that she was writing copiously in verse—in English verse. I entreated to be allowed to see what she had composed, and a bundle of MSS. was slipped into my hand. I hastened to examine it as soon as I was alone, but now there followed a disappointment, and with it an embarrassment, which, in the light of what followed, I make no scruple of revealing. The verses which Sarojini had entrusted to me were skilful in form, correct in grammar, and blameless in sentiment, but they had the disadvantage of being totally without individuality. They were Western in feeling and in imagery ; they were founded on reminiscences

of Tennyson and Shelley ; I am not sure that they did not even breathe an atmosphere of Christian resignation. I laid them down in despair ; this was but the note of the mocking bird with a vengeance.

“ It was not pleasant to daunt this charming and precocious singer by so discouraging a judgment ; but I reflected on her youth and her enthusiasm, and I ventured to speak to her sincerely. I advised the consignment of all that she had written, in this falsely English vein, to the waste-paper basket. I implored her to consider that from a young Indian of extreme sensibility, who had mastered, not merely the language, but the prosody of the West, what we wished to receive was, not a mere *réchauffé* of Anglo-Saxon sentiment in an Anglo-Saxon setting, but some revelation of the heart of India, some sincere penetrating analysis of native passion, of the principles of antique religion, and of such mysterious intimations as stirred the soul of the East long before the West had begun to dream that it had a soul.”

The result of the advice was wonderful.

“ With the docility and the rapid appreciation of genius, Sarojini instantly accepted, and with as little delay as possible acted upon this suggestion. Since 1895 she has written, I believe, no copy of verses which endeavours to conceal the exclusively Indian source of her inspiration, . . . she springs



from the very soil of India, her spirit, although it employs the English language as its vehicle, has no other ties with the West. It addresses itself to the expression of emotions which are tropical and primitive, and in this respect, as I believe, if the poems of Sarojini Naidu be carefully and delicately studied, they will be found as luminous in lighting up the dark places of the East as any contribution of savant or historian. They have the astonishing advantage of approaching the task of interpretation from inside the magic circle, although armed with a technical skill that has been cultivated outside of it."

Mr. Arthur Symons, in his beautiful introduction to the first volume of Sarojini's verse, *The Golden Threshold*, has also praised her for her Indianness. "They hint, in a delicately evasive way," he says, "at a rare temperament, the temperament of a woman of the East"; and he has epitomised the whole character of the poetess's life and work in the title of a charming little reminiscence in *Mes Souvenirs*—"The Magic of the East."

One has only to open a volume of Sarojini's works to find confirmation for the testimony which the poetic insight of her two most distinguished critics has disclosed to us. I open the first volume, *The Golden Threshold*, and my eye is caught by the very first poem in it—"Palanquin Bearers." Sarojini sees a palanquin passing out

of the gates of Hyderabad. She does not actually paint a picture of the whole scene as she witnesses it, because she believes a palanquin to be one of those characteristically Indian things which may serve as an "open sesame" to the doors of India. But in order fully to appreciate the song, it should be placed in its proper setting. The splendour of the sun! The fragrance of spring! And the rich lap of earth basking under the glorious canopy of the heavens. And a palanquin passing out of the gates of Hyderabad! Hyderabad! that regal city of gardens and old palaces, where meet men of different religions, castes, and creeds, high and low, where the old-world nobles, in their rich garments of colourful silks set in gold and silver and rubies and sapphires, bend down from their mighty elephants to look kindly at a poor farmer's bullock-cart, or stop awhile to hold converse with a fakir for whom the goods of this world have no meaning, and who sits emaciated, naked, in the heart of the busy throng intent on life's end. Sarojini sees a palanquin passing through such a setting.

A newly wed bride perhaps is being borne away to the house of her lover, or a *houri* from a prince's harem is going visiting. The palanquin bearers burst out in song, to celebrate the poetry implicit in their vocation. They have woven many a song to recite on such occasions, songs which have passed into the inexhaustible store-

house of the anonymous national verse of India. Each of them is a poet, and makes verse in his leisure hours to be sung during work-time. Or a new poem is composed during the journey. There are six of them bearing the palanquin. The headman in front sets a verse, the man next to him adds a second line to fit in with the first, the third supplies another in tune with the first two, the fourth another, and so the fifth ; the sixth completes the rhyme as well as the context. Then all of them sing it in a chorus as they run along the dusty road. Their song is caught by the passer-by, who hums it on his way home, and gives it as a gift to his friends on reaching his village or town.

William Morris once said that poetry should be something a man could sing to his fellows as he worked the loom. How truly the "Palanquin Bearers" satisfies that ideal of poetry may be obvious if I quote the poem :

Lightly, O lightly we bear her along,  
She sways like a flower in the wind of one song,  
She skims like a bird on the foam of a stream,  
She floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream,  
Gaily, O gaily we glide and we sing,  
We bear her along like a pearl on a string.

Softly, O softly we bear her along,  
She hangs like a star on the dew of our song,  
She springs like a beam on the brow of the tide,  
She falls like a tear from the eyes of a bride.  
Lightly, O lightly we glide and we sing,  
We bear her along like a pearl on a string.

But though the song incidentally justifies Morris's ideal, it was expressly designed to arrest the spirit of India for us, to catch the poetry and the music of it. If we are to avoid the injustice of an external criticism, therefore, it is in the direction of Sarojini's own ideal of poetry that we must search for a criterion to apply to her. What exactly is her ideal of poetry ?

The answer to this question is nowhere specifically laid down by the poetess, but I should think it is possible to glean from the quivering pages of her verse, and from her confidences to Mr. Symons and Sir Edmund Gosse, a coherent enough statement of her views of poetry.

"In her childhood she dreamed magnificently," writes Gosse, recalling one of his conversations with her; "she hoped to be a Goethe or a Keats for India." "This desire, like so many others, may," he comments, "prove too heavy a strain for a heart that

*" S'ouvrit comme une fleur profonde  
Dont l'auguste corolle a prédit l'orient.*

"But the desire for beauty and fame, the magnificent impulse, are still energetic within the burning soul."

Gosse's gracious way of putting the ambitious wish of Sarojini's juvenile days does not hide the fact that it was made in an ordinary conversational way without any serious realisation of its

precise significance. The richness, the vitality, the exuberance of her lyrics, their burning, palpitating rhythm, passionately throbbing for loveliness, altogether different from Goethe's thoroughly intellectual poetry, may appear to approximate to Keats's early love of "glory and loveliness"; but if we accept the very profound interpretations offered by Mr. Middleton Murry, then the author of

Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all  
Ye know on earth and all ye need to know,

is an absolute idealist of the Hegelian sort, or a deep religious romanticist, rather than an hedonist racing for momentary emotion, whereas Sarojini lives on "her nerves of delight," and is stirred into song by the merest feeling certainly.

Her hedonism, however, is not of the ordinary Western kind. It is something more vital. Beginning her poetic career in the England of the nineties, she certainly acquired a taste for the kind of sensation that finds expression in the nice phrases of Mr. Symons and other followers of Swinburne. Suffering from ill-health, the love of ephemeral pleasure was engendered in her rather deeply.

"I too," she writes to Mr. Symons, "have learnt the subtle philosophy of living from moment to moment. Yes, it is a subtle philosophy, though it appears merely as an Epicurean doc-

trine : ' Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we may die.' I have gone through so many yesterdays when I strove with death that I have realised to its full the wisdom of that sentence ; and it is to me not merely a figure of speech but a literal fact."

But against her " desire to be a wild free thing of the air like the birds with a song in my heart," is the deep-rooted pantheism of her inheritance. On Mr. Symons advising the publication of her first volume of verse she wrote :

" Is it possible that I have written verses that are filled with beauty ; is it possible that you really think them worthy of being given to the world ? You know how high my ideal of art is ; and to me my poor casual little poems seem to be less than beautiful—I mean, with that final enduring beauty I desire."

In another letter she writes : " I am not a poet really, I have the vision and the desire but not the voice. If I could write just one poem full of beauty and the spirit of greatness, I should be exultantly silent for ever ; but I sing as the birds do, and my songs are as ephemeral."

In the light of this innate idealism which secretly sleeps in her, it would be unfair to call her a mere sensationalist. Omar Khayyámian romanticism seems to me to describe her poetry more aptly. The Oriental poets seem to oscillate between two aspects of the Universe they see

around them. Asia is replete with colour and movement. Tints on which the eye never wearies of feasting, sounds that enchant the ear with their weird music, scents that with their luxurious balm ever renew man's zest to breathe life's breath. This loveliness, however, is the superficial aspect of the East. Beneath the surface there is something much deeper. The kaleidoscopic crowds who walk the narrow bazaars of its dream cities seem full of some secret joy ; a sweet dignity, a patient resignation reigns about them, and gives to the worldly atmosphere in which they move an other-worldly look.

The Oriental poets sometimes paint the scene in the gayest of colours, at others they seek to arrest the slumbering spiritual numinous that enshrouds it. Living in the fiery emotionalism of an earthly life, the air of heaven hangs upon their words and gestures, waiting to be dragged into light to radiate its bright gleams of deep meaning and overloaded significance. The see-saw between these two dominating currents is seen most conspicuously in Omar Khayyám. In Rumi, in Hafiz, and in Jami, mysticism has got the ascendancy. Sa'adi too emancipates himself towards the end from the shackles of slavery to phenomena, and dedicates himself to the quest for eternal verities. Omar of the *Rubáiyát* lingers somewhere in the middle, inclining now to this side, now to that. Sarojini, who like most of the

Hindustani poets is his true child, follows him implicitly. She is always painting lovely little miniatures in Omar's true Persian manner, creating a dream-world of fancy with endless microscopic strokes of the finest of fine brushes, occasionally rising to a conception of the divine, but mostly remaining a mere child-like romanticist.)

(As miniature paintings then must her poems be enjoyed. They reflect thought in terms of life—life coloured and glorious. Seen from this point of view, I think, her lyrics are innocent of a false accent or a false emphasis.

“The people of the East,” wrote E. G. Browne, the celebrated historian of Persian literature, “have much of the child's love of the marvellous ; they like their kings to be immensely great and powerful, and their queens to be immensely, incomparably beautiful.” There come to mind the beautiful panegyrics of the Persian court poets, and of Ghalib and Zok, who both served Bahadur Shah, the last of the Moghuls, whose genius for poetry was more profound than his ability to rule, and whose tragedy is the more poignant because, denied paper and ink, he described it in some of the most passionate verses in Hindustani literature on the walls of his prison house in Burma. Our poetess's ode to H.H. the Nizam of Hyderabad is inspired by the same sentiment, and since it is a definite proof of Persian and Urdu influences, I shall quote a stanza of the poem to



illustrate its typically Oriental conceits. She addresses the Nizam :

Sweet sumptuous fables of Baghdad,  
The splendours of your court recall !  
The torches of a *Thousand nights*  
Blaze through a single festival ;  
And Saki-singers down the streets,  
Pour for us, in a stream divine,  
From goblets of your love *ghazals*  
The rapture of your Sufi wine.

If one misses here the absurd flights of fancy of an Hafiz, a Zok, or Ghalib, it is perhaps because Sarojini's enthusiasm for royalty has been partially dulled by her acquisition of Western democratic preferences ; but there is enough of the Eastern panegyric in it to make it sound like an echo of those old times when, as the chroniclers tell us, kings would give away whole kingdoms for a song.

To see the poetess's romantic exuberance at its highest pitch of enthusiasm, however, one must turn to her treatment of life and nature in general. That she is a master of landscape painting is suggested by her letters to Mr. Symons. In one of them she writes :

" Come and share my exquisite March morning with me : this sumptuous blaze of gold and sapphire sky ; the voluptuous scents of neem and champak and serisha that beat upon the languid air with their implacable sweetness ; the thousand

little gold and blue and silver-breasted birds bursting with the shrill of life in nesting time. All is hot and fierce and passionate, ardent and unashamed in its exulting and importunate desire for life and love. And do you know that the scarlet lilies are woven petal by petal from my heart's blood, these little quivering birds are my soul made incarnate music, these perfumes are my emotions dissolved into aerial essence, this flaming gold and blue sky is the 'very me,' that part of me which incessantly and insolently, yes, and a little deliberately, triumphs over that other part—a thing of nerves and tissues that suffers and cries out, and that must die to-morrow perhaps, or twenty years hence."

Combined with this capacity to ally herself with the very spirit of her surroundings, is, of course, her gift of music, and her desire for beauty. And at their magic touch she is stirred into full-throated melodies about a fairy land in which each fruit, flower, and bird is a golden image of delight.

Sarojini revels in the charms of spring in many a rhyme scattered all over her words. In the volume, *The Bird of Time*, which takes its name from Omar Khayyám's verse :

The bird of time has but a little way  
To fly . . . and lo ! the bird is on the wing,

the spring is treated in a section by itself. *The Golden Cassia, Asoka Blossom, The Call of Spring,*

*June Sunset*, are perhaps the most beautiful among all her spring songs, and cry out for quotation. A stanza of the last may serve as a specimen :

A brown koel cries from the tamarisk bushes,  
A bulbul calls from the Cassia plume,  
And through the wet earth the gentien pushes  
Her spikes of silvery bloom  
Whene'er the foot of the bright shower passes  
Fragrant and fresh delights unfold :  
The wild fawns feed on the scented grasses,  
Wild bees on the cactus gold. . . .

The desire for loveliness is inevitably related to love. So love too dominates Sarojini's mind very intensely. The intensity of this feeling in her is, I think, a blessing, for it helps her to steer clear of the pitfalls of sentimentalism into which lack of force may have led her rather dithyrambic voice. (As a matter of fact, in her treatment of love she inclines very strongly to the profound idealistic side of her nature, and approaches nearest her ideal of great poetry as objective and impersonal, taking the form of contemplation, as if in prayer, on the very essence of love. The reason for this is perhaps that in regard to love her romantic Urdu and Persian precursors had learnt to be deeply religious. The loves of Laila and Mejnun, Khusrau and Shirin, had formed the subject of epic poems by such deep poets as Nizami and Jami, and Maulana Jalal-ud-Din Rumi had used meta-

phors of ordinary human love to adumbrate the reality of Divine immanence.

In India, apart from the traditional love tales of the epopees, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, such local legends as Hir and Ranja, Sassi and Punnoo all sought to sanctify the human impulse, so that love of woman and love of God were synonymous. This holy view makes the lover potentially capable of being at the same time an ideal hero of romance, as well as a perfect saint, or endows him with the capacity to rise to the divine from the human without difficulty. In both states, however, whether human or divine, love in the East engrosses the lover's entire being. He has no use for the world, and lives merely for the realisation of his goal; and worldly goods, even food and drink, cease to have any use for him. He pines for union with the beloved, weeps, and spends himself in acquiring the gifts necessary for the achievement of his ideal. His only joy is in his misery, until Oneness with the beloved is realised. The following verses from Sarojini's *Vision of Love* reflect the everyday thoughts of Indian lovers :

O love ! my foolish eyes and heart  
Have lost all knowledge save of you,  
And everywhere—in blowing skies  
And flowering earth—I find anew  
The changing glory of your face,  
The myriad symbols of your grace.

The devotional love which possesses the hundreds and thousands who go to bathe in the Ganges and the Jamuna at Hardwar and Mathura respectively, year by year, finds expression in Sarojini through an ecstatic song put in the mouth of Radha for Krishna :

I carried my curds to the Mathura fair. . . .  
How softly the heifers were lowing. . . .  
I wanted to cry, " Who will buy, who will buy  
These curds that are white as the clouds in the sky,  
When the breezes of Shrawan are blowing ? "  
But my heart was so full of your beauty, Beloved,  
They laughed as I cried without knowing,  
Govinda ! Govinda !  
Govinda ! Govinda !

How softly the river was flowing !

I carried my pots to the Mathura tide. . . .  
How gaily the rowers were rowing. . . .  
My comrades called, " Ho ! let us dance, let us sing  
And wear saffron garments to welcome the spring,  
And pluck the new buds that are blowing ! "  
But my heart was so full of your music, Beloved,  
They laughed as I cried without knowing,  
Govinda ! Govinda !  
Govinda ! Govinda !

How gaily the river was flowing !

I carried my gifts to the Mathura shrine. . . .  
How brightly the torches were glowing. . . .  
I folded my hands at the altars to pray,  
O shining One guard us by night and by day—  
And loudly the conch shells were blowing.  
But my heart was in your worship, Beloved,  
They were wroth when I cried without knowing,  
Govinda ! Govinda !  
Govinda ! Govinda !

How brightly the river was flowing !

Here the poetry of romanticism, of ornate epithets and delicate similes, has become infused with transcendental experience. Sarojini has transformed love as personal desire into divine love, and given it a sense of eternity, of the Universal.

As in her treatment of love, so when she is oppressed by the finite character of life, perhaps because of the gravity of her theme, or perhaps because her enthusiasm for life has paled with the passage of time and given place to speculative interests, the idealist in her seems to dominate the romanticist. The expression too seems in her last two volumes to have become more skilful; there is a perfect fusion of conception and expression, and the philosophy of her race finds adequate utterance. Sarojini was early conscious of the fluctuations of human destiny, and convinced of the fickleness of fate. The Hindus are, one may say, born with such thoughts already in their minds, or they are early taught to think these thoughts as the poetess taught her own children :

Till ye have battled with grief and fears,  
And borne the conflict of dream-shattering years,  
Wounded with fierce desire and worn with strife,  
Children, ye have not lived : for this is life.

So the nature of the goal of salvation to which she points becomes of utmost importance. Happily, Sarojini's inherited race-consciousness can be

trusted to steer her course into the embrace of the true ideal :

Perchance we may glean a far glimpse of the Infinite Bosom  
In whose glorious shadow all life is unfurled  
Through the luminous hours ere the lotus of dawn shall re-  
blossom,  
In petals of splendour to worship, the Lord.

In the following stanza, from the poem in *Salutation of My Father's Spirit*, her belief in the ideal of her ancient heritage is more adequately recognised :

Farewell, farewell, O brave and tender sage !  
O mystic jester, golden-hearted child !  
Selfless, serene, untroubled, unbeguiled  
By trivial snares of grief and greed or rage ;  
O splendid dreamer in a dreamless age !  
Whose deep alchemic vision reconciled  
Time's changing message with the undefiled  
Calm wisdom of thy Vedic heritage.

And in a poem, to the *Buddha Seated on a Lotus*, she brings home to us the entire mystery of the Absolute of Hindu thought and aspiration in the following two lines with skill and masterliness :

And all our mortal moments are  
A session of the Infinite.

However, the full implications of the Hindu view of life remain yet to be worked out by Sarojini Naidu. The sombreness which pervades her

last book is significant of her growth and development, and reflects a period of transition. She dedicated it "to the dream of to-day and the hope of to-morrow." Since that "to-day" (August 1916) there have been many "to-morrows." What beauty, what truth they have produced is not yet known. The cause of Indian nationalism has lain heavy on her heart, and the muses seem to have been out of favour. We shall eagerly await the day when, her political battles finished, she will return to the Infinite of her last-quoted poems: meanwhile we possess, in her *Dreams of To-day and Yesterday*, some of the most remarkable emanations of Indian romanticism.

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## HARINDRA NATH CHATTOPADHYAYA

It is impossible, having talked of Sarojini Naidu, not to be reminded of her younger brother, Harindra Nath Chattopadhyaya. And yet his claims to our consideration are not merely incidental. For though the greater reputation of his sister has in some ways deprived his work of that measure of attention which it deserves, he is easily the most distinguished of India's younger poets, the leader of those young men and young women on whose shoulders rests the arduous responsibility of perfecting the contemporary renaissance.

In my essay on Sarojini Naidu, I have extensively quoted from those beautiful letters of hers to Arthur Symonds which give such a vivid picture of the home life of the Chattopadhyayas in Hyderabad. In tracing the early influences to which we owe the genius of Harindra Nath, I cannot do better than refer the reader who wants a full statement, to those letters. Here it may be briefly noted that, born some years after his sister, he became, like her, early conscious of all those forces which their father was harnessing to the service of his brilliant and many-sided culture.

He went to school, but his real schooling, as the schooling of his sister before him, was in the home where his father presided.

“ My ancestors for thousands of years,” Sarojini Naidu has written, “ have been lovers of the forest and mountain caves, great dreamers, great scholars, great ascetics. My father is a dreamer himself, a great dreamer, a great man whose life has been a magnificent failure. I suppose in the whole of India there are few men whose learning is greater than his, and I don’t think there are many more beloved. He has a great white beard and the profile of Homer, and a laugh that brings the roof down. He has wasted all his money on two great objects : to help others and on alchemy. He holds huge courts every day in his garden of all the learned men of all religions—Rajahs and beggars and saints and downright villains, all delightfully mixed up and all treated as one. And then his alchemy ! Oh, dear, night and day the experiments are going on, and every man who brings a new prescription is welcome as a brother. But this alchemy is, you know, only the material counterpart of a poet’s craving for beauty—the eternal beauty. ‘ The makers of gold and the makers of verse,’ they are the twin creators that sway the world’s secret desire for mystery ; and what in my father is the genius of curiosity—the very essence of all scientific genius—in me is the desire for beauty. Do you remember Pater’s

phrase about Leonardo da Vinci, 'Curiosity and the desire of beauty' ? "

Harindra Nath has also acknowledged the debt he owes to his ancestors :

My ancestors are dreaming dreams in me.  
This melody of love and youth and tears  
Is but an echo of the melody  
They chant even now beyond a thousand years.

When from the crowded ways I move apart,  
Silent ancestral seers I seem to meet  
Treading the lonely roadway of my heart,  
The rhythm of my footfall in their feet.

And he has honoured "the Revered and Sacred memory of his mother and his father," in the dedication of one of his early books of poems.

But though both, brother and sister, have paid their homage to the spirits of their ancestors, the character of their actual response to parental influence has been very different. Sarojini, as we have seen, full of "her nerves of delight," reacted mainly through feeling, so that her poetry, assimilating mainly the romanticism of her ancestors' lives, remained from beginning to end predominantly decorative. Harindra achieved a more judicious fusion of thought and sensation, and his verse is essentially deep and profound—philosophic and religious. Even as a prodigy of fifteen, when he burst out in print with some poems of childhood called *The Coloured Garden*, we

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find in him a remarkable welding of thought and emotion.

At the age of fifteen the poet sagely sings that—

A thousand gold-bags of a Persian king  
Are equal balanced with a grain of sand ;

and at nineteen he invites us to his *Feast of Youth*, and dispensing the Sufi “ wine of love,” assures us on the oath of the *Vedanta*, that—

The Universal Beauty dances, dances  
A glimmering peacock in my flowering flesh !

Harindra Nath reacted to the more speculative side of his father's culture than his sister ; and, conscious of her unfortunate early experiences as a poet in the “ falsely English vein,” avoided that blight of young poets, unconscious imitation, and sought for a definite background before he wrote a single line of poetry. By this I do not mean, of course, that he constructed a philosophical system in all its entirety and began to render it in verse. But in so far as a significant poet may be said to know to what particular tradition he belongs, to know what he wants to say, and how he is going to say it, Harindra Nath seems to have asked himself to what culture he is contributing, in what history of literature his name is going to be mentioned.

The first considerable poetry of Harindra Nath

was written in *The Feast of Youth*, referred to above. It is Indian to the core, Indian through and through, if by Indian we understand the New Indian. For this poet, the youngest of all those treated in this volume, born in the twentieth century, is the most conscious to all those impulses of our age which are going to make of India the hot-bed of a real and vital modernity.

With the Vedantic Hinduism of his inheritance he mingles the vigour of the Sufi creed. We do not know to what influence he owes his early interest in Sufism. It was probably that, living in a cultured home in the Muslim-ruled Hindu state of Hyderabad, he came into intimate contact with all those Muslim nobles and divines who came to deliver formulæ of alchemy or to talk philosophy in his father's courtyard, and he was impressed by the living, burning truth of the religion of the heart that they represented as the major contribution of Islamic culture. The lives of the Vaishnava saints and reformers in which he seems to have been early interested had presumably brought home to him the evil of Shankracharya's interpretation of the world as illusion (*Maya*). He sought at once to relate the Hindu and the Sufi ideals, and seems early to have perceived the need for balancing up the sum total of the two creeds. The kind of pantheism that resulted in the doctrine which defines the Universe as a manifestation of the Eternal Beauty, man as an

incarnation of God, and describes his aim as the realisation of union with His Self, he knew to have been foreshadowed in ancient Hindu lore as in Islamic literature. But he realised that it needed confirmation from a new poet to be emphasised, so he invokes the *Fire* of his being to guide him to all the illusory centres of the heart :

Kindle your glimmering lamp in the Infinite space, O Love !  
Let the dark shadows dance in the burning depths of mine  
eyes.

I am athirst for one glimpse of your beautiful face, O Love !  
Veiled in the mystical silence of stars and the purple of the  
skies.

Harindra Nath's perception of the affinities between the Hindu and the Sufi views of life at the age of seventeen is a remarkable feat ; his recognition of the subtlest implications of those two vast philosophical systems is the feat of a genius. He knows, for instance, that for both these systems the soul is pre-natal, and that for both the full perception of earthly beauty is nothing but a rehearsal of the joy of the Supreme Beauty seen in the spiritual world, and that in spite of the veil of the body the soul can perceive the Divine mystery through the twin methods of love and devotion.

O sky ! your heart and the heart of the sod  
Are born in the wonderful womb of my God,

he sings, and again :

Sometimes, O Love ! Thou art revealed  
To me, and sometimes art concealed.  
Somewhere, this strange Unity  
Flowers in Thee and only Thee !  
Love ! Thou sayest to me, " I  
Build my home in earth and sky. . . .  
In the hue of the new-blown rose  
See ! my hidden beauty grows.  
I am born in every note  
Showering from the bulbul's throat. . . .  
My pulsating dreams rejoice  
In each tender maiden's voice,  
I dwell in every starry spark,  
And laugh alike in light and dark."

The burning fire of this young mystic, desiring to remove his false self, to discover God, the Pure Being within him sees harmony in everything, and giving love to all creation, acquires a greater power of love himself. But he is not content yet, he prays for ever more power to love :

O make my burning blood Thy sparkling wine  
For Thee to drink at pleasure and rejoice !  
'Transmute my flesh into a song divine  
For Thee at will to voice.

" Harindra Nath Chattopadhyaya is, I am convinced," wrote James Cousins in an introductory note appended to *The Feast of Youth*, "a true bearer of the 'Fire, not the hectic and transient blaze of youthfulness (which has its time and place, and only a place and a time), but the incor-

ruptible and inextinguishable flame of the immortal youth which sustains the worlds visible and invisible." As will have become obvious from the leaping ardour of Harindra Nath's flame, the tribute was not altogether undeserved. To the poet himself it seems to have afforded a great deal of encouragement, for we see that immediately after the publication of *The Feast of Youth*, he seriously set to work to enlarge his consciousness, or rather, may one say, to seek for a new direction. The mystic consciousness centring its existence in an unending contemplation of Unseen Perfection becomes too grooved in a mode of thought and expression, and then the poet looks for a new style, a new gift of fitting new words to new thoughts.

In 1922 (?) Harindra Nath Chattopadhyaya joined the University of Cambridge to prosecute research on the poetry of William Blake, and although he never finished his thesis, he read deeply into the works of the English mystic, and unconsciously assimilated a great deal of his philosophy and method into his poetry. Blake's influence on Harindra Nath, however, is a subtly silent one, permeating the very marrow of his bones, and remaining hidden and unnoticeable in its exertion. Another and more obvious debt the poet owed to A. E. (George Russell), whose work he had read, and to whom presumably at Cousins's suggestion he had sent his first book of verses. A. E.



recognised a twin spirit in the young Indian, and wrote to him encouragingly : " Your poetry has beautiful things in it. You have the roots of poetry in you." Is it to be wondered at that Harindra Nath's next book of poems, *The Magic Tree*, takes its title from A. E.'s ? :

And from the magic Tree of life  
The fruit falls everywhere.

The young poet further openly recognises his kinship with the older mystic in the dedicatory poem to his wife, Kamala :

A tree hath blossomed in my mood  
Whose roots are buried in the sky,  
The magic tree of solitude  
That burgeons into eyes.

Beloved ! wing to fiery wing  
Upon the branches of the tree,  
Twin-hearted song-birds sit and sing  
Sweet songs of thee to me.

A. E. has taught him one great truth above all others—humanism. The Hindu gazes out across the vast spaces of his country, he lifts his eyes, mute and remote, to the august distances of the sky, and loses touch with his fellow beings. The sheer vastness about him imposes silence and detachment on him. Now and again he will probe the depths of his Being, and recognise that beyond the silence there is nothing deeper, and that he

must retrace his steps back to humanity. But more often than not asceticism comes to prevail. We have seen how, under the influence of Sufism, Harindra Nath learnt to integrate his inherited sense of illusion with a pantheistic fire. From A. E. he learns something more vital because more tangible—the human touch.

“When first I discovered for myself how near was the king in His Beauty,” A. E. has written, “I thought I would be the singer of the happiest songs. Forgive me, Spirit of my spirit, for this, that I have found it easier to read the mystery told in tears, and understood Thee better in sorrow than in joy; that though I would not, I have made the way seem thorny, and have wandered into many byways, imagining myself into moods which held Thee not. I should have parted the true from the false, but I have not yet passed away from myself who am in the words of this book.”

Harindra Nath sings :

The Fountain

In every heart a jewelled fire  
Of godliness unconsciousness glows,  
The earthly seed of man's desire  
Gives birth to an immortal rose.

Each human body makes or mars  
The inspiration of the skies,  
There is no colour in the stars  
That is not drawn from mortal eyes.

And thus in human pride I sing  
Though none my music understand,  
The faery palace of a king  
Is fashioned by a beggar's hand.

This strain of thought dominates the poet's next three volumes of verse, *Perfume of Earth*, *Out of the Deep Dark Mould*, and *The Wizard's Mask*.

Equipped with the technique he has acquired from his European models, Harindra Nath set back, on his return to India, to explore the ancient ideals of his country more deeply and more thoroughly than he had done before :

While I was musing in the woods to-day  
Over the piteous pride of passing things,  
All suddenly I heard something say :  
" Where are your ancient wings ? "

Stung to the quick with this realisation he flies with his *ancient wings* among " the holy birds on the hill tops of Thirukalkuram," through *Grey Clouds and White Showers*. And with that remarkable insight which we have noted as characterising his early attempts at verse, he hits upon the very core of the Saivite faith that prevails in Thirukalkuram and the other South Indian temples.

Saivism is a vigorous living belief in Siva, one of the Gods of the Hindu Trinity, as the Supreme manifestation of the Spirit who sustains the rhythm of the cosmos in the steps of his ceaseless dance, during which he, as the good Principle,

## HARINDRA NATH CHATTOPADHYAYA 133

destroys the cunning, the fury, and the evil of mankind.

The dance of the Supreme Spirit evokes from Harindra Nath one of his noblest poems, from which I quote a part :

In a rich rapture of intoxication  
Dream-lost you move from deep shadowy deep  
Along infinitudes of mortal sleep  
Which veils the naked spirit of creation.  
Star upon star breaks forth in swift pulsation  
And multitudinous oceans swell and sweep  
Behind you, and enchanted forces leap  
Like giant flames out of your meditation.

Your dreaming done, once more you dance your reckless  
Dance of destruction, and from globe to globe  
You wander, fashioning a mystic necklace  
Of shattered worlds, trailing your godly robe,  
Shining and incorruptible and fleckless,  
Through burning darks which we may never pulse.

So dominated is our poet with the philosophical conception of Siva *Nataraja* as holding the eternal flux of the cosmos in check, that he would like to recommend the worship of Him as a religion to the world. But in the world at the moment he believes all values have become stereotyped dogmas :

Lord ! we have wrought us adamantine fetters  
And built ourselves a choking dungeon-house.  
Thy hands have writ in large and blood-stained letters,  
" Traitor ! " upon our heads and eyes and brows.

All along we have seen Harindra Nath tending towards a new outlook. And here, in the lines

quoted above, he finally revolts against the narrow orthodoxies current in India.

What, it may be asked, does he suggest should be done ? what is his constructive contribution ?

I think that a study of his later poetry would disclose that he believes in individual centres of experience as the most complete and satisfactory explanation of a fundamentally pointless Reality. On these individual centres he would recommend us to build our lives. But it seems that he is also convinced of a general curve of human experience (above and beyond the partial and limited views of life), which is ever enlarging, ever expanding. At first there is a glimpse of it in the world of nature :

The sky turns grey beneath a faery's wand.  
The white rain showers,  
The green frog croaks beside a lonely pond,  
A freshness glimmers on the leaves and flowers,  
And through these cool and rainy hours  
My soul grows hungry for the dim Beyond,  
Wherein strange colours glow and perfumes rise  
And everything is known :  
The meaning of the poem of the skies,  
The mute philosophy that fills a stone.

Then there are signs of it in the world of man, or rather in certain moments in the mind of man, when life becomes full of a peculiar sort of radiance :

The white ecstasy of the inner eyes  
To us familiar grown.

This light comes in the lives of most individuals ; it is a common trait of human experience. When it comes, it illumines the darkest stretches of our past experience, and makes our present stand out clear and distinct, and for a while, at any rate, it makes us one with every being on earth. Harindra Nath is convinced of this light, even professes to have lodged it in " the inn " of his Being for a day, and to have become one with, and through it with every being on earth :

I am an inn whose doors are open wide  
To wayfarers who go and come and go and come,  
The stream of life goes gurgling by my side,  
Its ever-tuning music makes me dumb.

Whether we burn one lonely little lamp  
Whose flame is nourished at my traveller's hands,  
They come and go, though nights be cold and damp  
And days be dim, in search of distant lands.

They are dim people, they who come and go  
Feeding my solitary lamp awhile,  
Their eyes are strange, their names I scarcely know,  
A gleam of memory lingers in their smile.

Some dress in sunset colours, some in pale  
Tints of clouds at dawn, but every one  
For ever hides his face behind a veil  
Of delicate stars and moon beams spun.

I stand without a word while they make merry  
Awhile and glow the air with floating mirth,  
And then I watch them crowding in a ferry  
Life's golden stream beyond the shows of earth.

All men cannot see this light. They have neither the potentiality nor the integrity of spirit to receive it. It is only the man of genius who

may have a glimpse of it. But even he cannot maintain it, sustain it. Harindra Nath Chattopadhyaya has been vouchsafed a vision of this spirit, if only for a day. Perhaps the secret energy which operates eternally and infallibly towards the ultimate end will understand the need of his human heart and give him the complete enlightenment he longs for. If that happens, the youth of India, of whose yearnings and aspirations he is the mouthpiece, may breathe afresh the golden breath of that first Divine Word, which in the dawn of Indian history rose in the hymn to the bright-eyed *Surya*, the world-illuminating Sun, a precious message of Infinite Beauty and Love from the broken alabaster jar.

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